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GANDHIJIS
DO-OR-DIE MISSION

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PREFACE

In the following pages is given an account of the activities of Mahatma Gandhi on his mission in the Noakhali district which he has named the "Do or Die" mission. The account covers the period up to November 20, 1946, when Gandhiji left his camp at Kazirkhil to lead a solitary life at Shrirampur for nearly a month and a half. The story told in this volume is, therefore, necessarily incomplete. No one knows, not even Gandhiji himself, when his mission will be concluded. Perhaps he alone has an idea as to the stage at which the mission can be considered as having ended. Even as it is, however, Gandhiji's mission is so singular and sublime in conception and so novel in its method of approach to a burning social issue that all the details of his activities are certain to be very interesting. This applies not only to those who have moral or intellectual sympathy with Gandhiji's efforts but also to those who do not believe in non-violence or in other aspects of what has come to be termed Gandhism. The Editor hopes to be excused for saying that there is an almost universal misunderstanding of Gandhiji's moral and social philosophy. This is due to a natural confusion of his personal religious outlook with his socio-political ideas. We in India admire saintliness so much that when we raise anybody to the status of a saint we relegate him to the mountain top far above the dusty atmosphere of real life bristling with great and small problems of day-to-day living of multitudes of real people. To think of Gandhiji as such a saint is wrong. His crowded career as a public man and the undoubted leader of a national revolution should be convincing testimony. And his latest "Do or Die" mission should remove the last doubts on that score.

The best commentator of Gandhism is Gandhiji himself. No better exposition of his mission can be possible than those offered by himself. The Editor has, therefore, tried to piece together his recent utterances and statements. Authorised versions have been incorporated so far as

available, and for this purpose the reports appearing in the *Harijan* have been freely drawn upon. Two articles from the pen of Shri Pyarelal, appearing in the same journal, entitled "*A Venture in faith*" and "*The Do or Die Mission*," have also been incorporated in this volume in order to present a fuller picture, which otherwise would have been impossible. Unfortunately, reports of Gandhiji's activities have ceased to appear in the *Harijan* since the 20th November last when he parted company with Shri Pyarelal and chose solitary living at Shrirampur. The responsibility for selecting and arranging the material is, however, solely the editor's ; so is also the responsibility for all that appears in this book of a commentative nature. The Editor has not tried to give a complete picture of the Noakhali tragedy. To do so in the present circumstances would, in the first instance, be hardly possible ; and secondly, it would be inadvisable in the interests of communal harmony. All that he has tried to do is to give a general picture of the problems arising out of the disturbance and an objective background to Gandhiji's decision.

The Editor's thanks are due to the Publishers for their enterprise in undertaking the publication of this book and particularly to Shri Amal Chandra Ghosh for his ready assistance and advice. The subsequent progress of Gandhiji's mission, including the story of his great pilgrimage, will be recorded in a companion volume which the editor intends to prepare and put into the hands of the reader as soon as it becomes possible.

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GANDHIJI'S PEACE MARCH IN NOAKHALI AND TIPPERA

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INTRODUCTION

On July 29, 1946 the Council of the All-India Muslim League decided to launch a programme of "direct action" with the objective of compelling the non-Muslims and other minorities of India to accept the League's demand of Pakistan. A Council of Action, from which Mr. Mahomed Ali Jinnah, President of the League, himself stood out, was appointed to settle the details of the programme. The precise nature and extent of this "direct action" has never been officially stated. But Mr. Jinnah had already been darkly hinting at "civil war" as the alternative to acceptance of the Pakistan demand, and now his lieutenants who were on the Council of Action began publicly to state that there were "a hundred and one ways" to put the Government into difficulties, that the League unlike the Congress was not committed to non-violence and that the Muslims well knew what they were to do. The cumulative effect of all this inciting propaganda was to set the minds of a certain section of Muslims in a definite direction. In Bengal particularly, where a Muslim League Ministry was in office, the situation was rendered the more explosive by the ill-judged and essentially fatuous declaration of the Chief Minister, Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, that the Bengal Government would declare their independence of the Central Government if the Congress came into power! The entire Muslim League press ran a virulent campaign of Congress-baiting and offered incitement to violent action under a very thin disguise. And the disastrous folly went to its climax when the Bengal Government declared August 16, a date fixed by the League high command for the celebration of the "Direct Action Day", to be a public holiday throughout the province. When a political party, by virtue of its being in power, enforces its party celebration on the whole administrative machinery by declaring a public holiday, it is natural that some at least of its adherents should infer from it that the party is the law of the land, and that anything done in the name of the party is above the scope of

the law. While the Governor of Bengal permitted this degradation of the administration, the Governor of Sind, the only other province with a Muslim League ministry, displayed greater firmness and thereby averted a calamity. In that province, too, the Ministry had declared a public holiday for August 16 and had also talked about declaring Sind "independent". The Governor cancelled the former and so ridiculed the latter that the tall talkers of the League were silenced. The Labour Governor of Bengal, however, saw no evil and heard no evil from his advisers.

What happened in Calcutta on August 16 and the three days following it can best be described as untrammelled mob fury with a complete abdication of civil government. Murder, loot, arson and mob fighting continued without any interference from the police. Troops were called out in certain parts of the city in the afternoon of the 17th, but it appears that they had received incomplete direction from the civil authorities, for several notorious areas of trouble escaped their presence for three more days, and there the slaughter of citizens and the plunder and firing of homes went on with unabated violence. Whether the police remained inactive under official instructions or out of sheer irresponsibility is now the subject of inquiry by a Commission presided over by the Federal Chief Justice, Sir Patrick Spens. But the plain fact is that the police were thoroughly idle. The Commission's report, if ever published, is expected to throw light upon this most shameful administrative scandal of the modern age.

To those who suffered from the Great Carnage of Calcutta and saw the behaviour of the infuriated mobs setting cold-bloodedly about their horrid business, not a shadow of doubt was left that this was a planned campaign to terrorise the minority community in Bengal into a quick recognition of the Muslim League's Pakistan demand and to provide the rest of India with a dreadful earnest of the state of anarchy and fearsomeness which the League could engineer in compelling such recognition. The howling mobs swore in the name of the League, whose flag and whose uniform were very much in evidence during the days of disturbance. 'Larke lenge Pakistan', 'Marke lenge Pakistan', 'Pakistan kayem karo' formed the battle-cry of the hooligans. But when the

awful business was over and a weary hush fell upon the city it was seen that Pakistan had been far from achieved, that the entire economic life of this home of 5 million people had been disrupted and its basis—intimate co-operation of both communities in productive social labour—seriously undermined. All that had been achieved by the slaughter of 5,000 people and wounding of 15,000—not to speak of the looting of about 10,000 homes—was to demonstrate the need for the maintenance of the British Army in India to keep order between the two communities. They had seemed quite friendly and normal only a few hours before daylight on August 16 ; in another few hours they had become mortal enemies. Such overnight transformation of a hitherto peaceful community is inexplicable if one rules out the possibility that some at least among the League's adherents had taken the fire-eating of their big leaders too literally.

It is not material to ascertain whether the underground preparations were made with or without the knowledge or sanction of the more responsible League leaders or the League Ministry of Bengal. A political party of Muslim bourgeoisie without active or even direct touch with the masses cannot necessarily be aware of what happens beneath the level of their class. Probably Premier Suhrawardy sincerely believed that the Direct Action Day demonstration would be non-violent, as he and other League leaders had directed it to be. If so, he himself had reason for complete disillusionment. But the fact remains that he failed to profit by the realisation of his catastrophic mistake, as was soon evident when serious rioting broke out at Dacca and, nearly two months after the Calcutta carnage, in the district of Noakhali and Tipperah .

It was on October 15 that the first news of a serious outbreak of lawlessness, spread over six thanas of Noakhali district, was released by the Government to the Press. This had started taking place from October 10, and the four days' delay in receiving the news indicates at once the magnitude of preparations of the lawless element as well as the criminal inefficiency of the administrative machinery. It took ten days, fraught with horror, disgrace and torture for nearly two lakhs of Hindus,

for the Army to reach the neighbourhood of the disaster, another ten days for them to move into the inner fringe of the disturbed area, and over a month to comb the interior of the devastated countryside.

The horror of the Noakhali outrage is unique in modern history in that it was not a simple case of turbulent members of the majority community killing off helpless members of the minority community, but was one "whose chief aim (to quote Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee) was mass conversion, accompanied by loot, arson and wholesale desecration..... No section of the people has been spared, the wealthier classes being dealt with more drastically. Murder also was part of the plan but it was mainly reserved for those who were highly influential or who resisted. Abduction and outrage on women and forcible marriages were also resorted to ; but their number cannot be easily determined. The slogans used and the methods employed indicate that it was all part of a plan for the simultaneous establishment of Pakistan. The demand for subscriptions for the Muslim League and for other purposes, including conversion ceremonies, showed that mass attackers and their leaders were inspired by the League ideology". (Statement to the Press, October 27, 1946).

Apparently, the strategy of terrorisation adopted in Calcutta had failed to achieve the objective of recognition of Pakistan. The zealots of Pakistan in Noakhali and the southern portion of Tipperah, therefore, sought to make that Muslim-majority area exclusive to a certain community, and thus convert it into the fortress of Eastern Pakistan, by forcible mass conversion of the other community. That this was a crude and savage method unsuited to the modern age will be clear to all thinking persons. The League leadership would certainly have been horrified, and would have advised the barbarous proselytisers of Eastern Bengal to desist, if they had had full previous knowledge of these plans. But once the outrages had been perpetrated the leaders tried to minimise the enormity of the crimes. Thereby they damned themselves doubly ; they tended to confirm the impression that they were in close sympathy with the attackers and their nefarious policy and that this was the second phase of the direct action plan of the Muslim League to achieve Pakistan.

Continuing, Dr. Mookerjee said :

"It is false to suggest that the perpetrators were a gang of hooligans or that they mostly consisted of outsiders. The local people were the perpetrators in many cases and there was a general mass sympathy for what happened. In some instances there were Moslems who helped to save lives, but their number is extremely small, and those thus saved, unless they could flee away, have lived and are living in the villages as converts and have been equal victims of the hooligans. Local officers were warned of the possibilities of the impending catastrophe, but they took no steps to check the activities of the open instigators who were preaching hatred and violence day in and day out. By their failure to protect lives and properties when disorders actually broke out and continued for days, they stand completely self-condemned and do not deserve to remain in office. In fact their continued presence is a hindrance to the return of normal conditions. After such a catastrophe only about 50 persons have been arrested in Noakhali and some more in Tipperah. Searching of looted properties has yet to begin in a vigorous manner. Strange to say, already some of arrested persons have been bailed out and their return to the villages is bound to complicate further the question of restoration of order.

"Thousands have fled away from the inner danger zone and are now living in relief centres within the district, but outside the immediate clutches of their oppressors. Their condition can easily be imagined. Thousands have run away from neighbouring areas yet unaffected out of panic, and they along with others, coming from the affected zones, are living in camps opened at various places like Comilla, Chandpur and Agartala. The total number of these classes of evacuees will be somewhere between 50 and 75 thousands, including men, women and children of all conditions and castes."

"Over and above these persons, there will be another 50,000 or even more who are still living within the danger zone in what may be called the no-man's land. Theirs is the most tragic fate and their recovery is a problem which cannot brook delay for a single day. They have all been subjected to conversion and are still under the clutches of their

oppressors. They are only men in name ; spiritually they are dead. Most of them have lost everything, and they suffer from both physical and mental collapse. They, too, belong to all classes of Hindu society with no special treatment for the Scheduled castes or others. Their humiliation and torture know no limitations. Their names have been changed ; their womenfolk insulted ; their properties looted ; they are being compelled to dress, to eat and to live like their so-called new brothers in faith. The male members have to attend the Mosques, Moulvies come and train them at home ; they are at the mercy of their captors for their daily food and indeed for their very existence. They are being made to undergo a rapid transformation so that they may be lost to the society to which they belong. Their backbone is crushed and their surrender is complete. They dare not protest or even meet Hindus who may enter into their houses from outside unless they find that armed escorts are accompanying them. Printed leaflets have been distributed using the names of some of them, who were local Hindu leaders, both their old and new names being given, declaring their willing acceptance of the new faith and asking all to remain in future as they are to-day. Petitions are being brought to S.D.O's recording their willing conversion.

"They may move about with permits signed by local Moslem leaders who testify to their recent change of religion. Indeed some of them managed to reach Choumohani near Noakhali during our stay there and narrated their tragic and piteous fate and of others left behind, in the very presence of two Moslem League Ministers and the District Magistrate, who were then in conference with us. It is said in official communiques that peace prevails in Noakhali. True, there have not been fresh outbreaks, but what prevails is not the peace of the living but the peace of the grave."

The death-roll of this Pakistanic campaign cannot yet be ascertained with any degree of accuracy. Popular estimate put it down to not less than 5,000, while Government estimate placed it "low in the three-figure category". Neither, it will be realised, was based on any

kind of statistics, for at the time these widely conflicting figures were claimed. outsiders, official or non-officials, had practically been unable to penetrate into the affected areas, whose approaches were strongly guarded by armed hooligans preventing all means of entry and exit.

Acharya Kripalani, at that time the President-elect of the Congress, was probably the first outsider to see for himself the devastation in Noakhali and Tipperah. Accompanied by his wife, Sreemati Sucheta Kripalani, he braved the personal danger of moving unprotected into a land of anarchy where the Congress was anathema to the fanatical mob. The following is his own account of his pioneer tour :

"We started from Calcutta on the 21st noon by plane and arrived at Comilla at 2 P. M. From Comilla we entrained for Chandpur at 10 P.M. and remained at Chandpur for the night. Next morning we visited the interior of one of the affected areas. The place visited was Charhaim. To reach the place we had to travel some distance by steam launch, then by country boat and then two miles on foot through slush and water. To add to our difficulty raining started.

"Charhaim village and the surrounding areas are occupied by Namasudras (Scheduled castes) numbering about 20,000. It was completely destroyed. Most of the houses were burnt. People were living in sheds, built from the ruins of their houses. All their property had been looted. Cash, ornaments, utensils and clothes, and cattle also, had been taken away by the raiders. All the males and females had only the clothes they were wearing. They had no food to eat. Their condition was pitiable to the extreme. There had been cases of murder, but it was not possible during the short time at our disposal to ascertain the number of the killed. Cases of abduction were reported to us. Even after looting and arson the villagers were obliged to embrace Islam. They had to perform the 'Namaj' and recite the 'Kalma'. Some of them were given white caps and 'loongies'. Their Hindu names were changed to Muslim ones. All the images of the houses were broken and temples looted and destroyed. The conch-shell bangles of women and vermillion marks, signs of their married life, were removed.

"We had also decided to visit another village in Chandpur—named Paikpara. We heard that conditions were equally bad there. But hard-pressed for time, we decided to go to Noakhali. We left for Choumuhani in the afternoon of 23rd October and reached there in the evening. In the train we found Hon. Mr Shamsuddin Ahmed, Minister, was also going to Noakhali, 9 miles from Choumuhani. The Minister suggested that he and our party might go to the affected areas together next day. He said he would be able to procure some jeeps for the journey. He was to come at 10 A.M. on the 24th morning and we were to accompany him. In the morning, however, a military truck with a guard was placed at our disposal. As the truck could take only three of our party, I, accompanied by Mrs. Kripalani and Mr. Dhiren Dutta, proceeded in this truck. The Minister was, however, to follow us. On the way, we visited Begumgunj Thana which is at a distance of 2 miles from Choumuhani. There we got some information about what was happening. From there we pushed on farther. Our aim was to reach Dattapara. The military truck could take us only to a place three miles and a half from that point. We, therefore, decided to walk the distance.

"We reached Dattapara at about 1-30 P. M. In Dattapara, excepting a few houses, nothing had been burnt or looted. At Dattapara there was a camp of refugees in the house of a local zeminder. We visited this camp. There, many people were anxious to make statements about what had happened to their villages. But as we wanted to reach some affected villages, we enquired from them and they directed us to go the nearest village, Khilpara, which is at a distance of three miles and a half from Dattapara. We told the people of the refugee camp that we would take their statements on our return.

"They said what happened was the work of the local Muslim villagers and many of them could be identified. They could even give names of the miscreants. We told them to write down the names in their statements.

"We then proceeded to Khilpara. At Khilpara, too, there was a refugee camp in the house of a local zemindar. Khilpara is a mixed village. We saw some burnt Hindu houses. All Hindu houses were looted and there had been mass conversion of the Hindus

"In the refugee camp, my wife interviewed women of the Chowdhury family of Noakhali. Eight men of this family, the entire male population was killed. One girl had to hide herself in jungle for four days to save herself before she was rescued.

There were five widows left in the family. They had been plundered of everything they possessed. In the bazar, we found that all Hindu shops had been looted and League flags were flying on them. We also saw a couple of huts had been erected which were used by the Muslim mobs as places of meeting. It was 5 P.M. before we returned from this place to Dattapara. We reached Dattapara at 6-30 P.M. and after taking statements, we returned to our truck three miles and a half off on the main road. We had altogether walked 14 miles and returned to Choumuhani at 10 P.M. We utilised the 25th October in summarising and tabulating the statements which gave us valuable information."

The conclusions drawn by Acharya Kripalani as a result of his tours, as detailed to the Press on October 27, deserve careful examination not only for the fact that these were the result of first-hand investigation but also because they were conclusions drawn by the highest political functionary in India—the head of India's national political organisation as well as a man unafraid to be truthful even to his own disadvantage and discredit. These were :

"(1) The attack on the Hindu population in the districts of Noakhali and Tipperah was previously arranged and prepared for. It was deliberate, if not directly engineered, by the Muslim League. It was the result of Muslim League propaganda. The local evidences all went to prove that prominent League leaders in the villages had a large hand in it.

"(2) The authorities had warnings about what was coming. The warnings were conveyed to them orally and then in writing by prominent Hindus in the areas concerned.

"(3) The Muslim officials connived at the preparations going on. A few encouraged. There was a general belief among the Mussalmans that the Government would take no action if anything was done against the Hindus.

"(4) The modus operandi was for the Muslims to collect in batches of hundreds and sometimes thousands and to march to Hindu

villages or Hindu houses in villages of mixed population. The crowds had their leaders and spokesmen. They first demanded subscriptions for the Muslim League and sometimes for the Muslim victims of the Calcutta riots. These enforced subscriptions were heavy, sometimes amounting to Rs. 10,000 and more. Even after the subscriptions were realised the Hindu population was not safe. The same or a successive crowd appeared on the scene later and looted the Hindu houses. The looted houses in most cases were burnt. The loot was not confined merely to cash, ornaments and other valuables, but everything that could be utilised by the householders, such as foodgrains, utensils, cloths, etc., were looted. In most places the looters also drove away cattle themselves. Sometimes before a house was looted the inmates were asked to embrace Islam. However, even conversion did not give immunity against loot and arson.

"The slogans raised by the attacking Muslim crowds were those of the Muslim League such as "League Zindabad", "Pakistan Zindabad", "Larke Lenge Pakistan", "Marke Lenge Pakistan". The Hindu population was also told that the murder, loot and arson that went on was in revenge for the Muslim lives lost in Calcutta rioting.

"(5) All those who resisted were butchered. Sometimes they were shot, for the rioters had a few shot-guns with them. These guns belonged either to the Muslim Zemindar's or were stolen or snatched away from the Hindus.

Sometimes people were killed even when there was no resistance offered or expected.

"It was not possible for me to ascertain, in the short time at my disposal, the figures of those killed. I believe the Government has not ascertained these figures. One official definitely told me that over 100 had been killed. Another and a higher official told me that those killed was in the vicinity of 500.

"My investigation in one area, namely, round about Dattapara, revealed that at least 300 people were killed. The names of most of the victims were given to me in the statements that I have got. I have on record cases where 50 to 20 members of one family were brutally murdered. Some families lost all their male members.

“(6) Those who indulged in looting, arson, murder and mass conversion etc., were inhabitants of neighbouring Muslim villages and in the case of mixed populations, the village Muslims joined in these activities. The victims could identify many of those who participated. They have given me long lists of names. There were very few people if at all, from outside.

“(7) Even after looting, arson and murder, the Hindus in the locality were not safe unless they embraced Islam. The Hindu population therefore to save themselves had to embrace Islam en masse. As a sign of their conversion they were supplied with white caps used by Muslims of the locality. Very often these caps were new and were stamped with the map of Pakistan with the words “Pakistan Zindabad” and “Larke Lenge Pakistan”.

“The Hindu population was obliged to take part in Friday prayers and to recite Kalma and Namaz. The women were converted by their conch-shell bangles being broken and their “shindur” (vermillion) mark removed. As a sign of their conversion they were asked to touch the cloth consecrated by a pir. They had also to recite the Kalma.

“All the images of gods in Hindu houses were destroyed and all the Hindu temples of the affected areas looted and burnt.

“(8) There have been cases of forcible marriages. It is impossible at present to ascertain the number of such marriages. One girl was rescued by the European District Magistrate of Noakhali on the 25th on detailed report made to him by Sucheta Devi who had got facts from women, she had interviewed at the rescue camp at Dattapara.

“There have been cases of abduction but no definite figures could be ascertained by me at the short time at my disposal.

“(9) For obvious reasons it was not possible for me to ascertain the cases of rape. But women complained to Mrs. Kripalani of having been roughly handled, their conch-shell bangles, the symbol of their married life, having been broken and vermillion marks removed. At one place they were thrown on the ground by the miscreants who removed their vermillion marks with the toes of their feet.

"(10) The Hindus of these areas, whether converted or not, live in perpetual fear.

"(11) Approaches to the affected villages are effectively guarded by the League patrols. In some cases permits have been granted to the newly converted to leave a village and return back. I have seen these permits.

"(12) Those who happened to be outside the affected areas at the time of the disturbances had not been able to go to their villages. They have, therefore, no knowledge of their relatives in the affected areas.

"(13) Men, women and children from many families are missing. There are no means of tracing them. Village post offices are not functioning. People can neither receive nor transmit letters. They cannot get postcards or envelopes.

"(14) The police did not function during the riots. They are doing merely patrol duty now. They say that they had and have no orders to fire except in self-defence. The question of defending themselves never arose, because they did not interfere with the rioters.

"I can testify that arson went on upto the 20th. I heard from the officials themselves that about 50 arrests were made upto the 25th. I saw houses burning in Chandpur and Noakhali areas on the 19th and 20th from the air. These fires were observed on the 20th by the Chief Minister who flew with us in our plane from Chittagong. The areas I visited had already been devastated and all that I could see were burnt houses and helpless Hindu villagers whether converted or not. Having lost their all they have neither shelter, nor clothes, nor food.

"There are yet many pockets of Hindu population guarded by the Muslims. These people want police or military escort to take them to safe localities."

The immediate task before the people was, he said, to take out those Hindus, who wanted to leave their villages or immediately to restore such security by means of the military as would give them assurance that what had happened would not be repeated.

He further said that he did not believe that economic factors were behind all that had happened in East Bengal. Not a single rich Muslim

house had been looted, he added. To him it appeared to be "absolutely communal" and "absolutely one-sided."

The number of refugees from the affected areas of Noakhali and Tipperah, according to him, was between 40 to 50,000. The condition of the refugees was miserable. There was dearth of food, cloth and medicines. In some camps, diarrhoea had already broken out and there was danger of cholera coming in.

In conclusion, the Congress President appealed to every Bengali Hindu to keep calm and never think in terms of reprisal, tragic as beyond all description the happenings in the affected parts in East Bengal were.

While the President-elect of the Congress was in the midst of his arduous tour of investigation, the Congress Working Committee met in New Delhi and adopted the following resolution on the Bengal situation with particular reference to East Bengal :

"The Committee find it hard to express adequately their feeling of horror and pain at the present happenings in East Bengal. Reports published in the press and statements of public workers depict a scene of bestiality and medieval barbarity that must fill every decent human being with shame, disgust and anger. Deeds of violation and abduction of women and forcible religious conversion and of loot, arson and murder have been committed on a large scale in a pre-determined and organised manner by persons often found to be in possession of rifles and other firearms.

"The Committee are aware that it has been emphasised in certain quarters that facts have been exaggerated, but communiques of the Bengal Government and statements of the Chief Minister themselves paint such a picture of ghastliness and extensive tragedy that no exaggeration is necessary to add to the effect.

"The Committee hold that this outburst of brutality is the direct result of the politics of hate and civil strife that the Muslim League has practised for years past, and of the threats of violence that was daily held out in the past months. The chief burden for permitting a civil calamity of such proportions to befall the people of the province must rest on the Provincial Government. Further the Governor and the Governor-General

who claim to possess special responsibilities in such matters must also share the burden for events in Bengal. Their responsibility becomes the greater when it is recalled that the Calcutta tragedy had clearly given the warning and the minorities living in Eastern Bengal had made representations to the Government and the Governor and demanded protection and preventive measures. The Committee cannot help express their surprise and resentment that in those circumstances not only no preventive measures were taken but even after the outbreak of the crimes no adequate steps were taken in time to stop them and to apprehend the criminals. Instead an untenable attempt was made to cover up willing connivance or incompetence or both under the pretext of exaggeration of facts.

"The Committee, fully conscious as they are of the inadequacy of an expression of feeling on such an occasion, do express their heartfelt sympathy with the sufferers in East Bengal. They wish further to appeal to all decent persons of all communities in Bengal and elsewhere not only to condemn these crimes, but also to take all adequate steps to defend the innocent from lawlessness and barbarity, no matter by whomsoever committed.

"At the same time the Committee must sound a warning against retaliatory outbreaks of communal violence. Nationalism and communalism are in a final death grip. The riots in Bengal clearly form parts of a pattern of political sabotage calculated to destroy Indian nationalism and check the advance of the country towards democratic freedom. Therefore, the Committee lay too much emphasis on the warning that communalism can only be fought with nationalism and not with counter-communalism which can only end in perpetuating foreign rule.

"Acharya Kripalani, the President-elect, is now in Noakhali and will visit the other affected areas in Bengal. The Committee are awaiting his report, and will advise further action on taking into consideration all the information made available to it"

Many of the evacuees who flocked from Noakhali to Calcutta, Chandpur, and other safe areas had fled before the storm. These numbered about 50,000. But an equal number of helpless men, women, and

children had been caught in the net of the Pakistani brigands and these were daily being subjected to humiliations, torture, and sometimes death. They could be only rescued by the military, and this relief came so slowly that the moral collapse of the trapped Hindus was complete. They became so terrorised that once they had been removed from the scene of their oppression they refused to return to their village homes in any circumstances. So far it was a complete victory for lawlessness of medieval conception. And there was the looming danger that the hooligan elements would be encouraged by their success in Noakhali to emulate the example in other areas. The plain duty of every law abiding citizen and every patriot irrespective of community, creed, and party allegiance was to defend themselves and their neighbours against assailants of this type. Mahatma Gandhi was the first to emphasise that in the villages every Indian, man or woman, was his or her policeman, that he or she could only do this when neither harboured mischief against his or her neighbour no matter what religion he professed or denied." (HARIJAN, Oct. 20).

Coming back to Calcutta from his first tour of Noakhali Acharya Kripalani, too, advised every Bengalee to prepare for self-defence. He said :—

"From what I have seen and heard the day before and yesterday, I am clearly of opinion that whatever the Government, Provincial or Central, may or may not do, every Bengalee, male or female, has to defend himself or herself by whatever means he or she can think. In this connection I would keep before every Bengalee the example of Shri Rajendra Lal Roy and his family who defied the mob for full two days and fell fighting. Even as a believer in absolute non-violence, I hold that the resistance offered by Shri Rajendra Lal Roy and his family was the nearest approach to non-violence. I pay my tribute to his memory and the memory of all those who have fallen fighting against the lowest elements in society".

Sj. Sarat Chandra Bose and the Executive Council of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee also issued similar appeals for organization in self-defence. It was stressed by all Congress leaders that these defence organizations should not be communal or sectarian in composition

and character. They must by no means be aggressively minded. The guiding spirit of the organized youths of the country should be. "I am my brother's keeper".

Meantime, repercussions of the savagery of Noakhali began to be felt in the neighbouring province of Bihar where the Muslims are a minority of 14 per cent. The retaliatory violence in Bihar was as savage as the violence in East Bengal. This, together with the growth of a fighting spirit among the Bengalees, exercised a strong deterrent effect on the mischief-making elements in Bengal. The more responsible section of Bengalee Muslims, who did not approve of mob brutality to achieve political ends, also took their stand against such fanatical outbursts. Some semblance of order was established in the affected areas by military action.

But several outstanding problems created by these ugly incidents had to be tackled immediately. These were : (1) rescue of men, women and children from the clutches of hooligans, (2) rescue of women abducted, assaulted or forcibly married by miscreants, (3) relief for the large number of victims who had lost their all, and (4) their rehabilitation. This, however, was the short-term aspect of the problem. The long-term aspect of the problem also required urgent tackling. The Muslim League proceeds on the assumption that the Hindus and the Muslims are two different nations, although in well-defined geographical areas they have been living side by side for centuries, speaking the same language, eating the same food, belonging to a common economic order, sharing the same culture and suffering from common political disabilities under foreign domination. The League Press in Bengal was constantly harping on the theme that it was no longer possible for these two so-called nations to live together and that they must henceforth exist in separate blocks. Viewed from this angle, the sacking of Noakhali was a putsch for the creation of an exclusive Muslim zone in East Bengal.

It would be a mistake to suppose that this idea was a new-fangled one. The communal disturbances occurring in various parts of East Bengal since the beginning of 1946 bear a striking resemblance to Basmachi movement of Turkistan during the twenties of this century. That move-

ment, which took the form of widespread brigandage and armed conflict with the Soviet authority, aimed at the establishment of a purely Muslim state under a purely Muslim rulership. That the conception and the political ideology were absolutely medieval in character, that it was impracticable in the modern age of progressive socialism, had not influenced the fanatical leaders of the movement. But under the relentless forces of pressure of history and the weight of its own irrationality the movement, though extremely mischievous the while it lasted, had to liquidate itself.

The Congress Working Committee in its resolution of October 23 rightly viewed the essence of the communal trouble as the last bitter onslaught of communalist reactionary forces against the progressive forces of nationalism. The Congress is definite that the remedy for communalism is not counter-communalism of greater violence. In the last analysis, when large masses are long kept under the thumb of a semi-feudal authority and a priestly class, and are made to live in extreme poverty and ignorance they become fertile breeding grounds for violent reactionaryism in one form or another. It is among such people that propaganda for a purely religious state for Muslims can have the greatest effect. The root cause, then, is not religious or communal but economic and political, the communal colour of the present disturbances being only a perverted phase. Strong police or military action may suppress the outbreaks, but is no cure for the "mind diseased". Cure the mind, everything will be healthy again.

How, then, to effect this cure? Mr. Jinnah, in pursuance of his reactionary doctrine, believes that it is impossible. The conclusion to which he finds himself pushed is wholesale transference of population from the so-called Hindustan to Pakistan and *vice versa*. Otherwise, he threatens, there can be no end to civil war between his "two nations". Oddly, he seems to believe that the transference of crores of people, speaking different languages and possessing really the characteristics of different territorially distributed nationalities, could be any more peaceful than what he would call "civil war". The question of the physical possibility and the economic consequences of this transference or that of consultation of the Hindu and Muslim minorities concerned in this transaction does

not seem to trouble him. The division of India into so many religious zones, if accomplished by force, would evolve consequences too dreadful to contemplate. One of these is a retrogression into the eighteenth century and another, the perpetuation of internal strife. It would be an experiment in reactionaryism that, like the Pan-Islamic and the Basmachi movements, is destined to be a costly failure on its own merit.

It is clear that in any form of democratic social order—and in the middle of the twentieth century no other social order but a democratic one is possible—both the communities must exist side by side and free from fear in their activities. A nation cannot be conjured up by political jugglery. It represents a particular stage in the development of well-defined geographical areas. Before the Industrial Revolution one thought in terms of empires and kingdoms and not of nations. The minimum characteristic of a nation is a well-knit economic and political system, i.e., political independence and economic self-sufficiency. It is absurd to argue that India had never been a nation in the past; there were no nations in the past. India to-day is emerging into full nationhood with the imminence of political freedom and her development into a complete economic unit. Within the Indian "nation", or the politico-economic entity, are its component parts—the provinces, so arranged and re-distributed as to contain severally people speaking the same language and partaking of the same cultural traditions. These must enjoy the widest possible autonomy. But manifestly these provinces or, if you like to call them so, "sub-nationalities" and "groups" cannot be constituted on religious lines. A Hindu and a Muslim of Bengal cannot by any stretch of sophistry be divided in two "nationalities"; but Hindus of Bengal and Bihar or Muslims of Madras and U.P., to take two instances, clearly belong to different sub-national groups. Religion is no test of nationality, nor can the simple ceremony of conversion from one religion to another change a person's nationality. It is inconceivable for a Briton to become a Turk or *vice-versa* in that manner.

It is possible, however, that at a certain future stage of economic and other developments the present conception of what constitutes a nation and of nationalism will undergo a radical change. Already in the

Soviet Union we see evidence of a multi-national society and a definite tendency towards a merger of different national cultures into a common socialist culture. The hour for such a situation in India is yet unpredictable ; full political, cultural and economic autonomy and full practical equality of all units and groups must blossom out before a spontaneous movement for homogeneity can begin.

To be honest to ourselves, we must admit that the communal hostility which has revealed itself in an orgy of violence, reprisals and counter-reprisals is not entirely baseless, though the real basis that exists, unaided by the mischievous propaganda of the Muslim League and fanatic communalists, would have been entirely inadequate to cause such fury as is being witnessed. True, there is political and legal equality as between a Hindu and a Muslim. There is practically no disability also in the field of productive labour, although the scope for the higher categories of labour are somewhat limited for the Muslims on account of their relative deficiency in education. But in the field of day-to-day social intercourse Hindus and Muslims still live in two separate areas sharply divided by stout fencing. The chief responsibility for this must rest on the shoulders of the Hindu community which is culturally and economically more advanced. A large number of Hindus feel socially degraded by dining or intermarrying with Muslims, and the consciousness of this exclusiveness and assumption of superiority on the part of the Hindus inevitably causes resentment among the Muslims. The Congress is convinced that this widespread element of Hindu communalism has in its turn produced an exaggerated feeling of counter-communalism among the Muslims, and that the first condition of successful Indian nationalism is a complete disavowal by the Hindus of their own communalism. It is only in this way that Muslim distrust can be allayed, and their confidence gained. Mahatma Gandhi has emphasised this point for years without much avail. It is a pity that it needed such ghastly reminders as the Bengal and Bihar tragedies to bring its urgency home to us all.

But to return to our subject. The biggest problem for the Hindus of Noakhali is rehabilitation. The Congress stands on the principle that Hindus and Muslims should live side by side. It cannot, therefore,

countenance any attempt to render any area exclusive to any particular community by forcible means. If, however, they have to live side by side, they must live in perfect amity and on a footing of perfect equality. Freedom of worship must go hand in hand with freedom of social intercourse. If such a state of things could be brought about, all incitements to fanaticism and fratricidal communalism would be sterile like seed falling on stones.

Mahatma Gandhi's sojourn in the villages of Noakhali, which he has taken up as a mission of his life, should be interpreted in this light. It is not a mere tour of pacification or a goodwill mission. In a sense it is an experiment in social reconstruction and of building power from the village upwards. One naturally expects a lot of obstruction from all the reactionary elements—the League, the Government and even the vested communal interests among the Hindus. The ground that Gandhiji has chosen is perhaps the most difficult imaginable. That factor invests his lonely adventure with unexampled grandeur. The thinking Indian sees in Gandhiji, busy with his lone mission in that citadel of reaction, neither a prophet nor a saint but the leader of a revolution that will develop into a complete answer to fascism and militarism, two evils inherent in the Muslim League to-day.

To quote Dr. Amiya Chandra Chakravarty, "Noakhali has somehow become a laboratory where a crucial test is being made; the remedy will apply to similar situations all the world over where disputes arise between communities and nationalities and a new technique is needed for peaceful adjustment."

15th, December, 1946.

S. L. GHOSH

I

THE PATH OF NON-VIOLENCE

[The following excerpts from Mahatma Gandhi's recent statements, articles and prayer addresses indicate the practical aspects of the philosophy of Non-violence as applied to the ugly communal situation that has developed in this country since the Direct Action Day carnage in Calcutta.]

THE HINDU-MUSLIM QUESTION

The Secretaries of the National Congress took advantage of the A.I.C.C. session held during the closing days of September, 1946 in Delhi to arrange a meeting of the presidents and secretaries of the various Provincial Congress Committees with Gandhiji, who was staying at the Bhangi Colony in Delhi. Instead of delivering an address, he invited questions.

One of the questions asked was : How should the Hindu-Muslim question be tackled ?

Gandhiji replied :

"I must own defeat on that point. I know that mine is to-day a voice in the wilderness and yet I claim that mine is the only practicable solution. I can never subscribe to the view that because certain members of a particular community have indulged in inhuman acts, therefore the whole community may be condemned outright and put beyond the pale. The Muslim League may call Hindus names and declare India to be *Dar-ul-Harb*, where the law of *jihad* operates and all Muslims who co-operate with the Congress as Quislings fit only to be exterminated. But we must not cease to aspire, in spite of this wild talk, to befriend all Mussalmans and hold them fast as prisoners of our love. It would be a present possibility if Hindus in their lakhs offered themselves to be cut to pieces without retaliation or anger in their hearts. Non-violence is to-day rightly laughed out of court as Utopian. Nevertheless, I main-

tain that it is the only way to keep Hinduism alive and India undivided. The history of the Congress non-violence for the last twenty-five years has taught us nothing, if it has not taught us that.

"Not all the Muslim are Muslims Leaguers. The Muslim Leaguers have to-day raised the slogan that ten crores of Indian Muslims are in danger of being submerged and swept out of existence, unless they constitute themselves into a separate State. I call that slogan scare-mongering pure and simple. It is nonsense to say that any people can permanently crush or swamp out of existence one-fourth of its population, which the Mussalmans are in India. But I would have no hesitation in conceding the demand of Pakistan if I could be convinced of its righteousness or that it is good for Islam. But I am firmly convinced that the Pakistan demand as put forth by the Muslim League is un-Islamic and I have not hesitated to call it sinful. Islam stands for the unity and brotherhood of mankind, not for disrupting the oneness of the human family. Therefore, those who want to divide India into possibly warring groups are enemies alike of India and Islam. They may cut me to pieces but they cannot make me subscribe to something which I consider to be wrong."

COWARDICE NO VIRTUE

At the prayer meeting on October 2, Gandhiji further elaborated his theme.

He said that if they could not act non-violently, they should defend themselves violently rather than be cowards. But the ability to die smiling at the hands of a brother without retaliation, physical or mental, was the highest bravery. In no case was it right to spoil for a fight. That was no self-defence. It was bad for them, bad for the country and utter disloyalty to their leaders. It was hindering them in their march towards Swaraj.

REAL INDIA

On October 12, writing for the *Harijan*, Gandhiji emphasised that India would not come into her own unless everyone had learnt the art of dying without ill will. He observed :

"If my frequent wanderings throughout India of the villages have not deceived me, it can be confidently asserted that the 7,00,000 villages get and want no police protection. The solitary Patel to a village is a terrorist lording it over the villages and is designed for helping the petty revenue collector to collect revenue due to the Ma-Bap. I am not aware of the policeman having aided the villagers in protecting their goods or cattle against depredations of man and beast. The Police Patel is not to be blamed for what he is. He has been chosen for his task which he does well. He has not been taught to regard himself as the servant of the people. He represents his master the Viceroy. The change at the top has not yet permeated the most distant village. How can it? It has not come from the bottom. The Viceroy still retains legal and military powers to remove and even to imprison his ministers. The latter have no power, legal or other, to imprison the Viceroy. Even the Civil Service is still under his control. It is not suggested that the Viceroy does not mean to shed all power nor that he does not wish the most distant village to realise that he is determined under instructions from Whitehall to shed every vestige of British control in the quickest time possible.

"The relevance of all this writing is for showing that we do not yet learn from the village in which India lives that every Indian, man or woman, is his or her own policeman. This he or she can only do when neither harbours mischief against his or her neighbour, no matter what religion he professes or denies. If unfortunately the politically minded will not or cannot go as far as suggested here, he must at least shed all fear and resolutely deny himself all protection whether from the military or the police. I am positive that India will not come into her own unless every home becomes its own castle not in the sense of the ages known as dark but in the very ancient true sense that everyone has learnt the art of dying without ill will, or even wishing that since he cannot, someone else will do away with the would-be assassin. How nice, therefore, it would be if every one of us had this lesson burnt into us. There is much proof in support of the lesson, if we will take the trouble to examine the proof."

A CHALLENGE TO FAITH

[The following are questions put by the Associated Press of America correspondent on November 6, and Gandhiji's answers thereto]

Q. 1. In view of recent Indian history—1942 unrest, I. N. A. movement and unrest, R. I. N. mutiny, Calcutta-Bombay disturbances, movements in Indian States such as Kashmir and recent communal riots—can it be said your creed of non-violence has failed, in so far as non-violence has not taken root in Indian life ?

A. This is a dangerous generalization. All you mention can certainly be called *himsa* but that can never mean that the creed of non-violence has failed. At best it may be said that I have not yet found the technique required for the conversion of the mass mind. But I claim that the millions of the 7,00,000 villages of India have not participated in the violence alluded to by you. Whether non-violence has taken root in Indian life is still an open question which can only be answered after my death.

Q. 2. What should one do in his day-to-day life, that is, what is the minimum programme—so that one can acquire non-violence of the brave ?

A. The minimum that is required of a person wishing to cultivate the *ahimsa* of the brave is first to clear one's thought of cowardice and in the light of the clearance regulate his conduct in every activity, great or small. Thus the votary must refuse to be cowed down by his superior, without being angry. He must, however, be ready to sacrifice his post, however remunerative it may be. Whilst sacrificing his all, if the votary has no sense of irritation against his employer, he has *ahimsa* of the brave in him. Assume that a fellow passenger threatens my son with assault and I reason with the would-be-assailant who then turns upon me. If then I take his blow with grace and dignity, without harbouring any ill-will against him, I exhibit the *ahimsa* of the brave. Such instances are of everyday occurrence and can be easily multiplied. If I succeed in curbing my temper every time and though able to give blow for blow I refrain, I shall develop the *ahimsa* of the brave which will never fail me and which will compel recognition from the most confirmed adversaries.

NO PEACE BEFORE BRITISH TROOPS ARE WITHDRAWN

"The disturbances will not stop immediately, but they must stop much quicker when the British troops are withdrawn," observed Mahatma Gandhiji on November 6 replying to a question by the special representative of the United Press of India whether after the withdrawal of the British troops from this country the disturbances of the present nature would immediately stop.

The correspondent further asked. "How do you think the minority communities will be safeguarded from the fear and horror of the majority communities in different parts of the country?"

Gandhiji said : "The disturbances will not stop immediately. But they must stop much quicker when the British troops are withdrawn. Moreover, to-day we have to witness the degrading spectacle of wanting the help of British troops. However, people will necessarily learn the art of self-defence with counter-violence or, better still, with non-violence. The minorities will undoubtedly keep the British troops, if they can, unless they learn to be brave and trust the majority.

"Again, when the British troops are gone, the majority will know how to behave towards the minority. To-day even the best behaviour of the majority does not receive its full value, whilst the temptation of relying on British troops exists. By British troops I do not mean merely white soldiers but all who have been trained by British officers and have been trained to be loyal to the British in India and have been often enough used against the people to crush their freedom.

"In any event people will have first to learn to do without the protection of the military or the police during the communal troubles. The function of the police is to protect the citizen against thieves and robbers, of the military generally to defend the country against the foreign aggressor, where the people have not learnt the matchless bravery of non-violence."

When his attention was drawn to the fact that in Calcutta and other places people can move about quite safely even in the riot-affected areas if they dress in the European fashion as miscreants would take them for Christians, Gandhiji remarked :

“It is impossible for any self-respecting man to appreciate the advice for a Hindu to look like a Christian in order to avoid murder. I suppose we adopted, where we did, the European dress in order to please the Saheb. We forget the humiliating character of the change. The suggested change would cast reflection on both the Hindu as well as Muslim. In order to live at peace with one another we have to imbibe the virtue of toleration of the manners, customs and dress of different communities living in India.”

II

THE TRAVAIL

Ever since the blood-bath of Calcutta, Gandhiji had been wondering what his duty was. The gruesome happenings of Noakhali, which broke out on October 10, were first reported in the press on October 15. On that day he was discussing with a friend the recent happenings. Now his mind was made up. At the evening prayer-gathering that day he said that he had received numerous messages from Bengal inviting him to go there and still the raging fury. Whilst he did not believe that he had any such capacity, he was anxious to go to Bengal. Only he thought it was his duty to wait till Pandit Nahru's return and the meeting of the Working Committee. But he was in God's hands. If he clearly felt that he should wait for nothing, he would not hesitate to anticipate the date. His heart was in Bengal.

A friend was discussing with Gandhiji, on October 15, the recent gruesome happenings in Calcutta. His sensitive and refined spirit shrank from the very idea of narrow communalism. What filled him with anguish was not the loss of life so much, deplorable as it was, as the degradation of the human spirit that had resulted from the Calcutta happenings. "Even those who never thought in terms of communalism are now becoming communal-minded. But that was not all. The madness has spread."

As Gandhiji sat listening to the stories that came from Bengal, his mind was made up. "If I leave Delhi," he remarked, "it will not be in order to return to Sevagram but only to go to Bengal. Else, I would stay here and stew in my own juice."

He consulted two friends from Bengal that evening about it. "Allow us to go there first and report," said they. "Give us a chance to do our bit and then, if necessary, you can come." Gandhiji agreed.

In the course of the talk, one of them asked Gandhiji whether he would recommend fasting to check the orgy of communal madness that was spreading in Bengal. Gandhiji's reply was in the negative. He narrated how a valuable colleague from Ahmedabad had invited him to immolate himself. "We believe in the non-violent way but lack the strength. Your example would steady our wavering faith and fortify us." The logic was perfect and the temptation great. "But I resisted it and said 'no'. There is no inner call. When it comes, nothing will keep me back. I have reasoned with myself too about it. But I need not set forth my reasons. Let people call me a coward if they please. I have faith that when the hour arrives God will give me the strength to face it and I won't be found unready.

"Fasting cannot be undertaken mechanically," he proceeded. "It is a powerful thing but a dangerous thing if handled amateurishly. It requires complete self-purification, much more than what is required in facing death with retaliation even in mind. One such act of perfect sacrifice would suffice for the whole world. Such is held to be Jesus's example."

THE ANGUISHED VOICE

"I am trying to take my bearings, to see where I stand," he had casually remarked in the course of a conversation. He had since been pouring out his anguish in a series of prayer-gathering addresses. On the 15th October he referred to the orgy of Noakhali. There was first the flood havoc in Assam. Thousands had been rendered homeless, property worth lakhs had been destroyed and many lives lost. That was an act of God. But far worse than the news from Assam was the fact that an orgy of madness had seized a section of humanity in Bengal. Man had sunk lower than the brute. Reports were coming through that the Hindus, who are in a very small minority there, were being attacked by Mussalmans.

Ever since he had heard of the happenings in Noakhali he had been furiously thinking as to what his own duty was. God would show him the way. He knew that his stock had gone down with the people so far as the teaching of non-violence was concerned. They still showered affection upon him. He appreciated their affection and felt thankful for it. But the only way in which he could express his thanks and appreciation was to place before them and through them the world the truth which God had vouchsafed to him and to the pursuit of which his whole life was devoted, even at the risk of forfeiting their affection and regard.

At the moment, he felt prompted to tell them that it would be wrong on the part of the Hindus to think in terms of reprisals for what had happened in Noakhali and elsewhere in East Bengal. Non-violence was the creed of the Congress. It had brought them to their present strength. But it would be counted only as a coward's expedient if its use was to be limited only against the British power which was strong and while violence was to be freely used against our own brethren. He refused to believe that they could ever adopt that as their creed. Although the Congress had an overwhelming majority of the Hindus on its membership rolls, he maintained that it was by no means a Hindu organization and that it belonged equally to all communities. He had told Acharya

Kripalani, who had succeeded Pandit Nehru in the Presidentship of the Congress, that it was going to prove no feather-bed for him. If the Chief Minister of the Cabinet had to wear a crown of thorns, the Congress President would have to lie on a bed of thorns. The late Sir Syed Ahmed had called Hindus and Mussalmans the two eyes of India. The Congress President could not possibly discriminate between the two. He was pledged to equally serve both.

Gandhiji had therefore asked him to proceed on a mission of peace to East Bengal to teach people the art of dying without killing. It should be his privilege to demonstrate it by his personal example. He was going there with his wife not to protect one party but to stop the fratricide which threatened to overwhelm India. It was a good beginning for Acharya Kripalani and his wife. Sarat Babu, the brother of the late Subhas Babu, was going with them. He knew no barriers of caste or creed. Some years ago he was staying at Sarat Babu's house. He came to know how Subhas Babu used to look up to Sarat Babu.

The fair name of Bengal was being tarnished—Bengal that had given them so much, Bengal the home of Gurudev whose *bhajan* they had just heard sung. That hymn asked God to make the devotee wide-hearted and fearless. It was with that hymn on their lips that they were going and it was the audience's duty to wish them every success.

A WORD TO THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

He appealed to the Muslim League too to turn the searchlight inward. They had decided to come into the Interim Government. He hoped they were coming in to work as brothers. If they did, all would be well. And just as he had exhorted Hindus not to slay Mussalmans nor harbour ill-will towards them, so he appealed to the Muslim League, even if they wanted to fight for Pakistan, to fight cleanly and as brothers. The Qaid-e-Azam had said that minorities would be fully protected and everyone would receive justice in Pakistan. It was as good as Pakistan where they were in the majority and he implored them to treat Hindus as blood brothers and not as enemies. It boded ill for Pakistan if what was happe-

ning in East Bengal was an earnest of things to come. He hoped both Hindus and Muslims respectively would stand mutually as surety and pledge themselves to see that not a hair of the head of the minority community in their midst was injured. Unless they learnt to do that, he would say their assumption of the reins of power was a mere blind. What was going on in Bengal was not worthy of human beings. They had to learn to be human beings first.

LEAGUE MINISTRY'S RESPONSIBILITY

In an interview given to Mr. Preston Grover of the Associated Press of America on October 21, Mahatma Gandhi declared that the League Ministry in Bengal should be able to control the outbreak of disorders in East Bengal in which a good few thousands had been driven from their homes and an undetermined number killed or kidnapped.

"Control will depend on the Ministry," he said, referring to the Bengal Ministry of which the Muslim Leaguer H. S. Suhrawardy is head. "If the Muslim League wanted to control it, I should think that it could." He recalled that the Muslim League "has the overwhelming percentage of Muslim voters on their side."

He described the Bengal outbreak as "heartbreaking".

His comments on the outbreak of robbing, burning and looting in East Bengal were made in his small room in the Untouchable Colony where he had lived most of the time since the arrival of the British Cabinet Mission in March. He sat on a thin mat with a small sloping desk before him and Mr. Grover sat on the floor while he talked of many things including America, the New Government in India, South Africa and his own health.

He announced again his intention of visiting the troubled areas in Bengal after his meeting on October 23 with Pandit Nehru and the Working Committee where they will discuss problems created by the entry of the Muslim Group into the Central Ministry.

"The fact that I go there will satisfy the soul and may be of some use," he said.

"Will the Muslims listen to you ?" he was asked,

"I don't know," he said. "I don't go with any expectation, but I have the right to expect it. A man who goes to do his duty only expects to be given strength by God to do his duty."

To a question as to when this type of disturbances would end in India he replied :

"You may be certain that they will end. If the British influence were withdrawn, they would end much quicker. While the British influence is here, both parties, I am sorry to confess, look to the British power for assistance."

A HYSTERICAL DEMONSTRATION

Just before the evening prayer on October 24 a crowd of excited youngmen, carrying placards and shouting slogans, came to demand redress for East Bengal and invaded the prayer ground in the Sweepers' Colony. They wished their voice to reach the members of the Working Committee which was meeting in his room. Gandhiji told them that it had already reached them. His own place, he knew, was in Bengal. He assured them that the heart of every man and woman who believed in God was bleeding for Bengal. He admonished them for creating a disturbance at prayer-time and asked them to be calm and join in the prayers.

Somebody shouted that they could not pray when their house was burning. Gandhiji made that the subject of his prayer address.

The regular prayer was not recited. Gandhiji said their minds were not calm enough for it. *Ramadhuna* was sung and as usual had a calming effect on the gathering. Although the regular prayer had to be given up it was in his heart, said Gandhiji, and he was sure it would reach God.

Referring to the remark of the young man who had used the metaphor of a house on fire, Gandhiji said that the duty of the owner of the house or his servant was that when the house was burning he should concentrate on putting out the fire and not lose his head. He

alluded to the legend about King Janaka who remained calm and unperturbed when the report was brought to him that his capital was burning, because he had done all he possibly could before and after the accident and therefore could rest secure in his faith in God. If he had lost his head and run to the place of accident he would only have assisted the flames by distracting attention. They were pained at the news of women's suffering in East Bengal, said Gandhiji. But they had so lost their heads that they had themselves failed to be considerate towards the women in the audience. They had scared them away from the prayer ground. They had occupied the place where women sat every day. It was a strange way of demonstrating their sympathy with the outraged womanhood of East Bengal. He hoped that they would see the irony and inconsistency of it.

Our women were easily scared away. It was so more or less all the world over. He wanted our women to learn to be brave. His advice to them to commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be dishonoured, had been much misunderstood. They could keep a dagger for self-defence if they wished to. But a dagger was of no use against overwhelming odds. He had advised them to take poison and end their lives rather than submit to dishonour. Their very preparedness should make them brave. No one could dishonour a woman who was fearless of death. They had two ways of self-defence—to kill and be killed or to die without killing. He could teach them the latter, not the former. Above all he wanted them to be fearless. There was no sin like cowardice.

But there was a moral code even for those who believed in violence. He did not wish them to copy the methods said to have been adopted in East Bengal. They must have read Maulana Saheb's statement and the statement issued by the ex-President of the All India Majlis e-Ahrar. (See appendix). They had said that Islam did not permit forcible conversions or abduction and molestation of women.

III

WOMEN'S ORDEAL

"It is not death that matters but how you meet death," he remarked on the 17th October. To die at the hands of one's brother is a privilege, provided you die bravely. But what about women who were being abducted and forcibly converted? That no one could be 'converted' forcibly was here beside the point. "And why should Indian women feel so helpless? Is bravery the monopoly of men only? Women of course do not generally carry swords though the Rani of Jhansi did and outdid all her contemporaries in the valour of the sword. Still all cannot become Ranis of Jhansi. But all women can emulate the example of Sita whom even the mighty Ravana dared not touch. Ranis of Jhansi could be subdued."

"Let no one dismiss the example of Sita as legendary," he proceeded, and gave the example of Olive Doke who dared to go and live among the unclad primitive Negro tribes in the heart of Africa without fear of molestation. It was that higher type of valour which he wanted Indian womanhood to cultivate. The military and police might protect them from abduction but what about those who had already been abducted or who might be abducted in spite of the police and the military? They ought to learn to die before a hair of their head could be injured. He averred that it was possible for a woman to put an end to herself by choking or biting the tongue."

DEATH BEFORE DISHONOUR

The next evening he had to revise the technique suggested above. Dr. Sushila who had heard him the day before had told him—and Dr. B C, Roy who saw him the next morning confirmed her statement—that one could not end one's life by choking or biting one's tongue. The only way

known to medicine for instant self-immolation was a strong, poisonous dose. If this was so, he, the speaker, would advise every one running the risk of dishonour to take poison before submission to dishonour. He had, however, heard from those given to *yogic* practice that it was possible by some *yogic* practice to end life. He would try to inquire. His was not an idle idea. He meant all he had said. The very fact of steeling oneself for death before dishonour braced one for the struggle.

Woman in our country was brought up to think that she was well only with her husband or on the funeral pyre. He would far rather see India's women trained to wield arms, said the speaker, than that they should feel helpless. The vogue of carrying daggers and revolvers by women was on the increase. He knew, however, that arms were a poor weapon when it came to the matter of defending one's honour against odds. Arms were a symbol of one's helplessness, not strength. When one was deprived of them, generally there was nothing left but surrender.

ABDUCTED GIRLS

Replying to questions that had been put to him, Gandhiji in his prayer address on Sunday, the 20th of October, said that he had no hesitation in maintaining that forcible conversion was no conversion at all nor abduction a bar to the return to her home of the abducted girl. He held that no purification or penance was necessary in such cases. Hindu society was wrong when it imposed penance on such persons. They had not erred. He had lived for years among Muslims and Christians. They had all assured him that there could be no compulsion in religion. Those who resorted to it did not deserve to be called men of religion. In one sense he and his audience who believed that God was one and that there was no other and who believed that Mohammed was one of His messengers were Muslims. But if any one forced them or him to recite the *Kalma* they would flatly refuse to obey and take the consequences.

It was his fervent hope that all good Muslims would stand up against the practices reported from the affected area in East Bengal.

COMPLETE VINDICATION

A few days later a correspondent asked Gandhiji whether society should not make a special effort to reclaim and completely vindicate forcibly abducted girls and restore them to the fold. Gandhiji's answer (October 24) was categorical and a logical corollary of the views he had already made public a year ago when he had met a number of women of Midnapore district who had been assaulted by the police and the military during the August, 1942 Revolution. Both the question and Gandhiji's answer are reproduced below.

Q. You have called attention to the fact that girls who are forcibly abducted have not erred and that society would be wrong in penalising them. In further exposition of your views, would you tell us if any ceremony purporting to be one of marriage forced on unwilling victims of such outrage should be considered binding in any way against the will of the girls concerned? Is it not right that both society and the family should be broad-minded enough to receive them back? In the case of unmarried girls abducted or forced to undergo such mock ceremonies of marriage, should not a special effort be made by society not only to reclaim them, but to help them contract marriage in the normal manner and thus be completely vindicated and restored to the fold?

Gandhiji replied : You are right. All you say follows from my remarks referred to by you. I have no doubt that girls forcibly abducted have committed no crime, nor incurred any odium. They deserve the pity and active help of every right-minded man. Such girls should be received back in their homes with open arms and affection and should have no difficulty in being suitably matched.

IV

EMBARKING ON THE MISSION

After much travail, deep thought and considerable argument, Gandhiji fixed the date of his departure for Bengal for the 28th of October. "I do not know what I shall be able to do there," he remarked in the course of an argument with a very esteemed friend, who made an eleventh hour effort to dissuade him from setting on such a long journey just then. "All I know is that I won't be at peace with myself unless I go there." He then went on to describe the "power of thought." "There are two kinds of thoughts—idle and active. There may be myriads of the former swarming in one's brain. They do not count." He likened them to unfertilized ova in a spawn. "But one pure, active thought, proceeding from the depth and endowed with all the undivided intensity of one's being, becomes dynamic and works like a fertilized ovum." He was averse to putting a curb on the spontaneous urge which he felt within him to go to the people of Noakhali.

Speaking before the evening prayer gathering on Sunday, October 27, at New Delhi, Gandhiji said that he was leaving for Calcutta the next morning. He did not know when God would bring him again to Delhi. He wanted to go to Noakhali from Calcutta. It was a difficult journey and he was in poor health. But one had to do one's duty and trust in God to make the way smooth. It was not that God necessarily and always removed hardships from one's path, but He did always enable one to bear them.

He did not want anyone to come to the station, he continued. India had given him enough affection. It needed no further demonstration.

He was not going to Bengal to pass judgment on anybody. He was going there as a servant of the people and he would meet Hindus and Muslims alike. Some Muslims looked upon him as an enemy to-day.

They had not done so always. But he did not mind their anger. Were not his own religionists angry with him at times? From the age of seventeen he had learnt the lesson that all mankind, be they of any nationality, colour or country were his own kith and kin. If they were God's servants, they had to become servants of all His creation.

It was in that capacity that he was going to Bengal. He would tell them that Hindus and Muslims could never be enemies, one of the other. They were born and brought up in India and they had to live and die in India. Change of religion could not alter that fundamental fact. If some people liked to believe that change of religion changed one's nationality also, even they need not become enemies.

Sufferings of women had always melted his heart. He wanted to go to Bengal and wipe their tears and put heart into them, if he could. In Calcutta he would try to see the Governor and the Prime Minister Mr. Suhrawardy and then proceed to Noakhali.

He was proceeding under auspices none too happy. He referred to the ugly demonstrations before the Viceroy's House on the day before when Jawaharlalji and some of his colleagues in the Interim Government were abused and insulted. It was bad. Why should such things happen when the two parties, the Muslim League and the Congress, had formed a coalition at the Centre? Praise or abuse made no difference to the leaders who wanted to serve them to the best of their ability. But the people had to behave.

"Let us all still pray and hope that all the Ministers will be able to work as a team. If India can speak with one voice, she will be the greatest country in the world and every true Indian must wish her to attain that status."

A STRENUOUS JOURNEY

The journey proved to be as strenuous as some of us had feared. It was after 12 years that he was travelling on this line. Naturally there were mammoth crowds at all big stations on the way—at Aligarh, Tundla, Cawnpore and Asansol, the whole platform was like a swarming ant-heap

of humanity. They clambered on the roof, choked the windows, broke glass, smashed in the wooden shutters and yelled and shouted till one's ears split. They pulled the alarm chain again and again to obtain *darshan*, making it necessary to disconnect the vacuum brakes. The station authorities tried to drive them away by directing against them the water hose from the hydrant overhead. It made no difference to them, only it flooded the compartment ! At Aligarh the rags in the grease box of the brake began to smoulder and emit volumes of thick, acrid smoke which filled the compartment. It was with the utmost difficulty that one could manage to get through the crush and report to the railway authorities. If fire had broken out, one wonders how the party could have got out of the compartment at all with all the luggage.

Later in the evening Gandhiji sat with his fingers thrust into his ears to keep out the shouting and the din when they became unbearable. And yet when it was suggested to him that he might allow the lights in the compartment to be switched off to discourage *darshan*-seekers he turned down the suggestion. The only way he could requite the simple faith of the masses was, he said, by serving them with his last drop of energy and never to put his personal comfort before what he considered to be his duty towards them.

ARRIVAL AT SODEPUR

Gandhiji's train arrived at Lilooah five hours behind time. From the station he was driven straight to Shri Satish Das Gupta's Khadi Pratisthan Ashram at Sodepur which he reached at 5-30 in the evening of October 29. A crowd of several hundred had gathered there from round about Sodepur for the evening prayer. The advertised time for prayer was 5-30 P. M. But Gandhiji was able to attend prayer only after 7 P. M. In his prayer discourse he told them how he had never dreamt that he would be coming back to Sodepur so soon. But God had sent him in their midst again. The train had arrived five hours late. He called that also the will of God. No doubt there were big crowds at Aligarh, Khurja Road, Cawnpore and other big stations and the train was detained as a

result. But he literally believed in the old maxim that not a blade of grass moves but by His will. Some might say that all his talk about God was a make-believe which he used as a blind to cover his hypocrisy. All he could say was that he was not aware of any hypocrisy in himself. He spoke what he believed to be God's truth. As regards his future plan Gandhiji said that he had come to Calcutta with a blank mind to do His will. What he would do here and how long he would stay in Bengal he did not know. God would indicate to him the next step on reaching Noakhali.

The next day, October 30, owing to his engagements in Calcutta with H. E. the Governor and the Prime Minister, he had again to apologize to his audience for coming late to the prayer meeting. "He who gives all his time to the service of the people, his whole life is an unbroken round of prayer," he remarked. He did not, however, wish thereby to diminish the importance of fixed time for prayer. There was a difference between community prayer and individual prayer. He was sorry he had not been able to do justice to the former. It was generous of them to have waited for him with such exemplary patience and it filled him with joy and faith and confidence in regard to the task before him. But he could not forgive himself so easily for his failure to keep punctually the prayer appointment with them.

He drew their attention to the Viceroy's appeal, issued in the name of the whole Cabinet of which the Viceroy was the President and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru the Vice-President and which consisted of both Congress and Muslim League representatives. In that appeal the Viceroy, on behalf of himself and his colleagues, had appealed that the two major communities of India should bury the hatchet and become one at heart. The unity should be genuine, not imposed by the military or the police. The speaker had come to Bengal for that purpose. He took no side. He could only side with truth and justice. He wanted them all to pray with him for the establishment of heart unity between Muslims and Hindus. The world could not respect them if they kept quarrelling among themselves like wild beasts.

A FAINT RAY OF HOPE

Speaking on the third day of his arrival in Bengal, Gandhiji was able to tell his audience at the evening prayer meeting that he saw a faint ray of hope that peace might be established between the communities. He had met H. E. the Governor and the Chief Minister twice. The visit to the former was more or less in the nature of a courtesy call. His main business was with the Chief Minister. As one drove through the deserted streets with garbage heaps, at places banked up nearly two feet high against the pavements, and entire rows of gutted shops and burnt-out houses in the side-streets and by-lanes as far as the eye could reach, one felt overcome with a sinking feeling at the mass madness that can turn man into less than the brute. By its very nature this state of things cannot last. Human nature won't stand it. As Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot fool all the people for all time." There seem to be indications that the people are already beginning to sicken of the carnival of blood and bestiality. They had been fighting amongst themselves like wild beasts. The fighting could do no good to Calcutta, Bengal, India or the world.

To make peace between quarrelling parties, the speaker said, had been his vocation from his early youth. Even while he practised as a lawyer, he tried to bring the contending parties together. Why could not the two communities he brought together? He was an optimist, he said.

From them he wanted only this help : that they should pray with him that this mutual slaughter might stop and the two communities might really become one at heart. Whether India was to become divided or remain one whole could not be decided by force. It had to be done through mutual understanding. Whether they decided to part or stay together, they must do so with goodwill and understanding.

He could never be a party to anything which might mean humiliation or loss of self-respect for anyone. Therefore, any peace to be substantial must be honourable, never at the cost of honour.

In this he was only echoing the sentiment expressed to him by a prominent Muslim who had seen him. This friend had said : "We must

reach our goal, whatever it might be—Pakistan or undivided India—without bloodshed or fighting. I go so far as to say that if it cannot be reached except through bloodshed and fighting amongst ourselves, it is not worth reaching.”

THE GRIM RESOLVE

“Why do you want to go to Noakhali ? You did not go to Bombay, Ahmedabad or Chhapra, where things have happened that are infinitely worse than Noakhali. Would not your going there only add to the existing tension ?” Was it because in these places it was the Muslims who had been the sufferers that he did not go there and would go to Noakhali because the sufferers there were Hindus ?—he was asked by a Muslim friend the other day. Gandhiji’s reply was that he made no distinction between Hindu and Muslim. He would certainly have gone straight to any of the places mentioned by the friend, if anything approaching what had happened at Noakhali had happened there and if he felt that he could do nothing without being on the spot. It was the cry of outraged womanhood that had peremptorily called him to Noakhali. He felt he would find his bearings only on seeing things for himself at Noakhali. His technique of non-violence was on trial. It remained to be seen how it would answer in the face of the present crisis. If it had no validity it were better that he himself should declare his insolvency. He was not going to leave Bengal until the last embers of the trouble were stamped out. “I may stay on here for a whole year or more. If necessary, I will die here. But I will not acquiesce in failure. If the only effect of my presence in the flesh is to make people look up to me in hope and expectation which I can do nothing to vindicate, it would be far better that my eyes were closed in death.” He had mentally prepared himself, he added, for abstention from the Congress session, if necessary. He had similarly disengaged himself mentally from all his responsibilities in respect of Sevagram and Uruli—his latest love.

But with all his impatience to get to Noakhali he had to announce on the fourth day at the prayer gathering that he would not be able to leave for Noakhali on the next day as he had intended to. The Prime Minister

had sent him word that the train for him could not be arranged so soon. He hoped to leave on Saturday or Sunday. In the meantime he would try to render whatever service he could to the metropolis.

A DILEMMA

So four more days were to elapse before Gandhiji could actually leave for Noakhali. As harrowing details of the happenings in Noakhali trickled through, they added to the existing tension. *Bakr-Id* was close at hand and it was the wish of the Chief Minister of Bengal and his colleagues that Gandhiji should prolong his stay in the city at least till the *Id* festival was safely over. The root of the trouble, it was represented to him, lay in Calcutta. If the peace could be stabilized in the metropolis, it would have a salutary effect all over. Gandhiji acquiesced. The whole of India was faced with a difficult situation, that of Bengal was still more so, he remarked in his after-prayer address on Friday. He had been asked as to what their duty was under the circumstances. According to the scriptures, that was *Dharma* which was enjoined by the holy books, followed by the sages, interpreted by the learned and which appealed to the heart. The first three conditions must be fulfilled before the fourth came into operation. Thus one had no right to follow the precepts of an ignorant man or a rascal even though they commended themselves to one. Rigorous observance of harmlessness, non-enmity and renunciation were the first requisites for a person to entitle him to lay down the law, i. e. *Dharma*.

He had told them what he considered to be his duty. But they had to judge for themselves what their duty was. He did not ask them to follow him but he pointed out to them the way to discover what their duty was in the difficult position they found themselves in. The Gita had told them that if they only waited on God, they would know the way.

A HAPPY INSPIRATION

The visit of the four Ministers of the Interim Government to Calcutta to help further the peace efforts was a happy inspiration. It had a salutary effect and for the time being at least an impending crisis was

averted. As their visit coincided with that of the Viceroy it gave rise to all kinds of speculation. Would they ask the Viceroy to intervene or would they exert pressure on the Bengal Governor to make the Bengal Ministry take more effective measures? In a series of after-prayer addresses Gandhiji impressed upon the people how the desire of retaliation and the tendency to look to the Viceroy or the Governor, the military and the police, for protection were incompatible with Independence to which they were all pledged. The Viceroy's powers vested in the Cabinet, the Governor's in the Bengal Ministers. If they wanted lasting peace, it must come from the people's hearts. He had been proclaiming from the housetops that no one could protect them except their own stout hearts. No one could ever dishonour the brave. Retaliation was a vicious circle. If they wanted retaliation they could not have independence. "Supposing someone kills me, you will gain nothing by killing someone else in retaliation. And, if you only think over it, who can kill Gandhi except Gandhi himself? No one can destroy the soul. So let us dismiss all thought of revenge from our hearts. If we see this clearly we shall have taken a big stride towards independence."

A PLEA FOR SANITY

The warning came none too early. Already there were rumblings of a storm in Bihar. The cry for reprisals had gone forth. Gandhiji devoted his next address to show the illogicality and irrationality of that cry.

From his earliest childhood he had learnt to dislike the wrong, never the wrong-doer. Therefore, even if the Muslims had done any wrong, they still remained his friends, but it was his duty to tell them that they had done wrong. He had always applied that rule in life with regard to his nearest and dearest. He held that to be the test of true friendship. He had told them on the previous day that revenge was not the way of peace, it was not humanity. The Hindu scriptures taught forgiveness as the highest virtue. Forgiveness became a brave man. A learned Muslim friend had come to see him on the day before. He had told the speaker that the teaching of the *Quran* was also similar. If a man kills

one innocent person he brings upon his head the sin, as it were, of murdering the entire humanity. Islam never approves of but condemns murder, arson, forcible conversions, abductions and the like.

If they could not be generous enough to forgive a person who gave them a slap, remarked Gaudhiji, they could give him one in return. He could understand that. But if the miscreant ran away and the injured party slapped his relation or co-religionist by way of retaliation, it was below human dignity.

If someone abducted his daughter, the speaker continued, was he to abduct the abductor's or the abductor's friend's daughter? He held it to be infamous. Muslim friends had condemned such acts in Noakhali. But what was he to say of Bihar, if what he was told was true? He was pained beyond measure to hear of the reported happenings in Bihar. He knew the Biharis well. The cry of blood for blood was barbarous. They could not take revenge in Bihar for the happenings in Noakhali. He was told that some Muslims, who were running away from Bihar in panic, were murdered by Bihari Hindus. He was shocked to hear it. He hoped that the report was not true. It was contended that the *Mahabharata* advocated the way of retaliation. He did not agree with that interpretation. The lesson of the *Mahabharata* was that the victory of the sword was no victory. That great book taught that the victory of the Pandavas was an empty nothing.

He told them of the talk he had with Saheed Saheb, their Prime Minister. Years ago he had met him at Faridpur. Saheed Saheb then took pride in calling himself the speaker's son. He knew they had many grievances against their Prime Minister. But the latter had given him his assurance that he wanted peace. It had grieved him to alienate his Hindu friends. He, the speaker, could not disbelieve that assurance till it was found to be untrue. He had by giving that assurance put himself to test. The golden way was to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human family like members of one family. He who distinguished between one's own family and another's miseducated the members of his own and opened the way for discord and irreligion.

V

THE CARNAGE IN BIHAR

Immediately on seeing the report of the conflagration in Bihar in the Press, Gandhiji sent a wire through the Chief Minister to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who with his three colleagues had proceeded to Patna from Calcutta. The latter wired in reply that the situation was tense and grave in many parts but Government were doing their utmost to bring it under control. He himself with his colleague Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar had decided to stay on in Bihar as long as it might be necessary. "The Congress belongs to the people," commented Gandhiji in his silent day's written message to the prayer congregation. "The Muslim League belongs to our Muslim brothers and sisters. If Congressmen fail to protect Mussalmans where the Congress is in power, then what is the use of a Congress Premier? Similarly, if in a League Province the League Premier cannot afford protection to the Hindus, then why is the League Premier there at all? If either of them have to take the aid of the military in order to protect the Muslim or Hindu minority in their respective provinces then it only means that none of them actually exercise any control over the general population when a moment of crisis comes. If that is so, it only means that both of us are inviting the British to retain their sovereignty over India. This is a matter over which each one of us should ponder deeply."

FALSE MORAL ALIBIS

He deprecated the habit of procuring moral alibi for ourselves by blaming it all on the *goondas*. "We always put the blame on the *goondas*. But it is we who are responsible for their creation as well as encouragement. It is therefore not right to say that all the wrong that has been done is the work of the *goondas*."

He repeated the warning on the next day even more forcefully. The Hindus might say : did not the Muslims start the trouble ? He wanted them not to succumb to the temptation for retort but to think of their own duty and say firmly that whatever happened, they would not fight. He wanted to tell them that the Muslims who were with him in the course of the day had assured him that they wanted peace. They were all responsible men. They said clearly that Pakistan could not be achieved by fighting. If they continued quarrelling with each other, independence would vanish into thin air and that would firmly implant the third power in India, be it the British or any other. India was a vast country, rich in minerals, metals and spices. There was nothing in the world that India did not produce. If they kept on quarrelling, any of the big Powers of the world would feel tempted to come and save India from Indians and at the same time exploit her rich resources.

GOOD-BYE TO INDEPENDENCE

They wanted independence. They were ready to sacrifice their all for the Congress, the organisation which had done so much for India. Were they going to undo all that the Congress had done for more than the last 60 years ? He had told them they could return blow for blow if they were not brave enough to follow the path of non-violence. But there was a moral code for the use of violence also. Otherwise, the very flames of violence would consume those who lighted them. He did not care if they were all destroyed. But he could not countenance the destruction of India's freedom.

The reports of the happenings in Bihar were awful if true. Pandit Jawaharlal had told the guilty parties that the Central Government would never tolerate such barbarism. They would even use aerial bombing to put it down. But that was the way of the British. The Congress was an organization of the people. Was the Congress to use the foreign mode of destruction against the people whose representative it was ? By suppressing the riots with the aid of the military, they would be suppressing India's freedom. And yet what was Panditji to do if the Congress had lost control over the people ? The better way, of course, was to give

up the reins of Government, if the people were not amenable to discipline and reason.

To retaliate against the relatives of the co-religionists of the wrong-doer was a cowardly act. If they indulged in such acts, they should say good-bye to independence.

PENANCE FOR BIHAR

Everybody heaved a sigh of relief when it was known that the *Bakrid* had passed off quietly all over India. But the news from Bihar had set Gandhiji at war with himself. It was in Bihar that mass Satyagraha in India was born. It was in Bihar that his political career in India had practically commenced. And now it was the people of Bihar, for whom he had indefatigably laboured and who had showered upon him such love and affection—Bihar of Brijkishore Babu and Rajendra Babu—that had gone mad and besmirched the fair name of India. He had declared times without number that if the people of India should run amok against the English, they might find him dead. How could he be a witness to the same in regard to innocent Mussalmans who were after all our countrymen, our own kith and kin?

"I went on spare, milkless diet, principally for reasons of health soon after coming to Calcutta. The happenings in the country induced me to prolong it. Now Bihar will send me to complete fast if things do not radically mend," he wrote in a letter to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur on Sunday the 4th. "There will be no time limit," he added. "Do not agitate yourself but be really glad that I feel I have the strength to go through the ordeal and live up to my creed."

On the following day in a letter to Pandit Jawaharlal he wrote: "The news from Bihar has shaken me. My own duty seems to me to be clear. A deep bond unites me with Bihar. How can I forget that? If even half of what one hears is true, it shows that Bihar has forgotten humanity. To blame it all on the *goondas* would be an untruth. Although I have striven hard to avert a fast, I can do so no longer.....My inner voice tells me, 'You may not live to be a witness to this senseless slaughter.

If people refuse to see what is clear as daylight and pay no heed to what you say, does it not mean that your day is over?' The logic of the argument is driving me irresistibly towards a fast. I, therefore, propose to issue a statement that unless this orgy of madness ceases, I must go on a fast unto death. The fast may have to be delayed for some time. When you asked me at Delhi about it, I had replied that I was not thinking of it at the time. All that has now changed. You can strive with me, if you think differently. Whatever you say will carry weight with me. But knowing as you do my temperament, I am sure you will approve of my proposed step. In any event you will go on with your work without a moment's thought about my possible death and leave me in God's good care. No worry allowed."

But neither Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru nor the Sardar to whom he had caused a copy of the letter to be sent tried to dissuade him. They understood better the magnitude of the stake. It was nothing less than India's independence. Pandit Jawaharlal sent him word from Patna over the telephone that he did not think it was necessary for him (Gandhiji) to go to Bihar at present. He added that his (Panditji's) own place was in Bihar rather than in Delhi. "I am going to stay on here as long as it may be necessary." On the morning of the 6th, just before he was leaving for Noakhali, Gandhiji issued the statement foreshadowed in the letter to Pandit Nehru, which is reproduced below.

TO BIHAR

"To Bihar,

"Bihar of my dreams seems to have falsified them. I am not relying upon reports that might be prejudiced or exaggerated. The continued presence of the Central Chief Minister and his colleague furnishes an eloquent tale of the tragedy of Bihar. It is easy enough to retort that things under the Muslim League Government in Bengal were no better, if not worse and that Bihar is merely a result of the latter. A bad act of one party is no justification for a similar act by the opposing party, more especially when it is rightly proud of its longest and largest political record. I must confess, too, that although I have been in Calcutta

for over a week, I do not yet know the magnitude of the Bengal tragedy. Though Bihar calls me, I must not interrupt my programme for Noakhali. And is counter-communalism any answer to the communalism of which Congressmen have accused the Muslim League? Is it Nationalism to seek barbarously to crush the fourteen per cent of the Muslims in Bihar?"

I do not need to be told that I must not condemn the whole of Bihar for the sake of the sins of a few thousand Biharis. Does not Bihar take credit for one Brajkishore Prasad or one Rajendra Prasad? I am afraid, if the misconduct in Bihar continues, all the Hindus of India will be condemned by the world. That is its way, and it is not a bad way either. The misdeeds of Bihari Hindus may justify Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah's taunt that the Congress is a Hindu organisation in spite of its boast that it has in its ranks a few Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and others. Bihari Hindus are in honour bound to regard the minority Muslims as their brethren requiring protection, equal with the vast majority of Hindus. Let not Bihar, which had done so much to raise the prestige of the Congress, be the first to dig its grave.

"I am in no way ashamed of my *ahimsa*. I have come to Bengal to see how far in the nick of time my *ahimsa* is able to express itself in me. But I do not want in this letter to talk of *ahimsa* to you. I do want, however, to tell you that what you are reported to have done will never count as an act of bravery. For thousands to do to death a few hundreds is no bravery. It is worse than cowardice. It is unworthy of nationalism, of any religion. If you had given a blow against a blow, no one would have dared to point a finger against you. What you have done is to degrade yourselves and drag down India."

"You should say to Pandit Jawaharlalji, Nishtar Saheb and Dr. Prasad to take away their military and themselves and attend to the affairs of India. This they can only do if you repent of your inhumanity and assure them that Muslims are as much your care as your own brothers and sisters.

"You should not rest till every Muslim refugee has come back to his home which you should undertake to rebuild and ask Ministers to

help you to do so. You do not know what critics have said to me about your Ministers.

I regard myself as a part of you. Your affection has compelled that loyalty in me. And since I claim to have better appreciation than you seem to have shown of what Bihari Hindus should do, I cannot rest till I have done some measure of penance. Predominantly for reasons of health, I had put myself on the lowest diet possible soon after my reaching Calcutta. That diet now continues as a penance after the knowledge of the Bihar tragedy. The low diet will become a fast unto death, if the erring Biharis have not turned over a new leaf.

There is no danger of Bihar mistaking my act for anything other than pure penance as a matter of sacred duty.

No friend should run to me for assistance or to show sympathy. I am surrounded by loving friends. It would be wholly wrong and irrelevant for any other person to copy me. No sympathetic fast or semi-fast is called for. Such action can only do harm. What my penance should do is to quicken the conscience of those who know me and believe in my *bona fides*. Let no one be anxious for me. I am like all of us in God's keeping.

Nothing will happen to me so long as He wants service through the present tabernacle.

Sodepur, 6-11-'46.

Your Servant,
M. K. GANDHI.

VI

ON THE SCENE OF TROUBLE

It was on the 6th November that Gandhiji left Sodepur. He would have liked to travel to Noakhali by ordinary third class, but the Bengal Government had arranged a special train for him. They had also deputed Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed, Minister for Commerce, Khwaja Nasrullah Khan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Chief Minister and Maulvi Abdur Rashid to accompany him. To look to his convenience and ensure Government help whenever it might be required, the Chief Minister had himself intended to accompany him, but was held up in Calcutta. There were huge crowds at Kushtia, the home of Shamsuddin Saheb, Hacpur and Goalundo. At all these places Gandhiji delivered brief addresses, explaining the object of his visit.

From his early youth he had made friends with people of all communities. He had never made any distinction between Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and others. When as a boy he attended the High School at Rajkot, he did not remember a single occasion of a quarrel with a Muslim or Parsi boy in the school.

During the Khilafat days he used to say that Maulana Shaukat Ali carried him in his pocket. He did not wish to fight. At the same time he could never countenance peace at the cost of honour or self-respect. He stood for peace, honourable to both the parties. If any party did wrong, he would not hesitate to tell it plainly to their face. That was the duty and privilege of friendship. He had been a fighter all his life and he would fight oppression and wrong with his last breath, no matter who the wrong-doer was.

He recalled his previous visit to East Bengal during the Khilafat days. Those were the days of Hindu-Muslim unity, when the Muslims vied with the Hindus in claiming the Congress as their own. Congress

belonged to all. But he was not going to East Bengal this time as a Congressman. He was going there as a servant of God. If he could wipe away the tears of the outraged womanhood of Noakhali, he would be more than satisfied.

They were all Indians—Hindus and Mussalmans. They could not live in Independent India as enemies. They had to be friends and brothers. He would go to Noakhali and stay there till Hindus and Muslims again lived as blood brothers that they were, and must always remain.

He was hopeful that his tour would have a good effect and the Hindu-Muslim unity of the Khilafat days would come back. In Khilafat days no one talked of dividing India. Now they did so. But partitioning, even if it was desirable, could not be so achieved. It could not be retained except by the goodwill of the people concerned. The Bengal Ministers had assured him that the Muslims did not believe in getting Pakistan through force.

At Goalundo, Gandhiji took steamer and, steaming down the Padma 80 miles, reached Chandpur at evening. Two deputations, one of Muslim Leaguers and the other of Hindus, met Gandhiji here. At 2 p.m. the party reached Chaumuhani where Gandhiji had fixed up his headquarters for the time being.

OVERPROOF IS ADMISSION

It was at Chandpur that Gandhiji first directly contacted the local Muslim mind in regard to the East Bengal happenings. A deputation consisting of several prominent Muslim Leaguers of Tipperah district met him at Chandpur on board the *Kiwi* before he entrained for Chaumuhani on the morning of the 7th November.

One of them remarked that no disturbances had taken place in Chandpur Sub-Division, that the rush of refugees to Chandpur was due to panic caused by false press propaganda, that the number of Hindus killed by the Muslims was only 15 while double that number of Muslims had died as a result of firing by the military who were mostly Hindus.

Another member of the deputation, an M. L. A., was even bitter about the fact that the Hindus were still evacuating and their rehabilitation was being 'obstructed' by the Hindu workers who encouraged them to migrate in order to discredit the Muslim League Government and paralyse the administration.

Maulvi Shamsuddin, who was present at the meeting along with Maulvi Nasrullah and Maulvi Abdul Rashid interposed that it was no use isolating Chandpur sub-division and ignoring what had taken place elsewhere in the district. Equally irrelevant to their present argument was their reference to the military firing.

When they had finished, Gandhiji replying remarked that if what they had said was to be taken at its face value, then it amounted to this that the Muslims had committed no excesses, that the mischief had all been provoked by the excesses of the police and the military who were harassing the Mussalmans and that it was they, therefore, who together with the panic-mongering Hindus were the real culprits. That was too big a pill for anybody to swallow. Why had it become necessary to call the military, if no disturbances had taken place? A deputation of 20 to 25 Hindus had met him in the morning. They had told him awful tales of what had happened in Tipperah and Noakhali. Similar tales had been pouring into his ears ever since he had set foot in Bengal. Even Muslim Leaguers had admitted that terrible things had been done. They disputed the figures which they feared were exaggerated. He was not concerned with numbers. Even if there was a single case of abduction, forcible conversion or forcible marriage, it was enough to make every God-fearing man or woman hang down his or her head in shame.

He was not going to keep anything secret, Gandhiji proceeded. He would place all the information which he might receive before the Ministers. He had come to promote mutual good-will and confidence. In that he wanted their help. He did not want peace to be established with the help of the police and the military. An imposed peace was no peace. He did not wish to encourage people to flee from their homes in East Bengal either. If the mass flight of the refugees had been deliberately planned to discredit the Muslim Ministry, it would recoil on the

heads of those who had done so. To him it seemed hardly credible. He suggested that the right course would be to make a clean breast of the matter. "It is far better to magnify your own mistake and proclaim it to the whole world than leave it to the world to point the accusing finger at you. God never spares the evil-doer."

The gentleman who had spoken first thereupon admitted that he had heard of some cases of arson and looting but the looting had taken place after the occupants had fled. The deserted houses offered too strong a temptation to the hooligans.

"But why should people flee from their homes?" asked Gandhiji sharply. "People do not do so normally. Everybody knows that an unoccupied and unprotected house is bound to be looted by some one or the other. Would any one risk the loss of all he owns just to discredit the League?"

"99 PER CENT"

Still another member of the deputation remarked that only one per cent, of the people had indulged in acts of hooliganism. The rest, that is, 99 per cent were really good people and in no way responsible for the happenings,

"That is not a correct way of looking at it", replied Gandhiji. If 99 per cent were good people and had actively disapproved of what had taken place, the one per cent would have been able to do nothing and could easily have been brought to book. Good people ought to actively combat the evil, to entitle them to that name. Sitting on the fence was no good. If they did not mean it, they should say so and openly tell all the Hindus in the Muslim majority areas to quit. But that was not their position as he understood it. The Qaid-e-Azam had said that the minorities in Pakistan would get unadulterated justice in Pakistan. Where was that justice? Today the Hindus asked him if Noakhali was an indication of what they were to expect in Pakistan. He had studied Islam. His Muslim friends in South Africa used to say to him: "Why not recite the *Kalama* and forget Hinduism?" The speaker used to say in reply that he would gladly recite the *Kalama* but forget

Hinduism never. His respect and regard for Hazrat Mohammed was not less than theirs. But authoritarianism and compulsion was the way to corrupt religion, not to advance it.

Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed, agreeing with Gandhiji, quoted a verse from the Quran to the effect that there can be no compulsion in religion. He had told the Mussalmans, he said, that if they wanted Pakistan they must mete out justice to the minority community and win its confidence. "By doing what you have done you have killed Pakistan," he had told them.

"Mr. Mc. Inerny, the District Magistrate of Noakhali, in a leaflet he has issued," resumed Gandhiji, "has said that he will assume, unless the contrary is conclusively proved, that anyone who accepted Islam after the beginning of the recent disturbances was forcibly converted and in fact remained a Hindu." If all the Muslims made that declaration it would go a long way to settle the question. "Why should there be a public show of it, if anybody genuinely felt inclined to recite the *Kalama*? A heart conversion needs no other witness than God." Mere recitation of the *Kalama* while one continued to indulge in acts which are contrary to elementary decency was not Islam but a travesty of it. That reminded him of the Plymouth Brothers who invited him to embrace Christianity because then he would be free to do anything he liked since Christ redeemed the sins of those who accepted Him. As against that there was the conclusive verse of the New Testament: "Not everyone who says Lord, Lord, with his lips comes to Me." It was therefore up to the leaders of the Muslims to declare that forcible repetition of a formula could not make a non-Muslim into a Muslim. It only shamed Islam.

"All that has happened is the result of false propaganda," argued one member of the deputation who had not hitherto spoken.

"Let us not make a scapegoat of false propaganda," replied Gandhiji. "False propaganda would fall flat if we are all right."

Finally one of the deputationists remarked that they were all prepared to go into the interior along with the Hindu leaders to restore peace and confidence but the latter distrusted them.

Gandhiji replied that that did not matter. He would gladly accept their offer. "You and I will visit every village and every home in the interior and restore peace and confidence."

ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

At Laksham there is a refugees' camp. And it was to the refugees that Gandhiji's words were addressed through the crowd that had assembled at the platform to hear him and have his *darshan*. "I have not come on a whirlwind propaganda visit. I have come to stay here with you as one of you. I have no provincialism in me. I claim to be an Indian and therefore a Bengali even as I am a Gujarati. I have vowed to myself that I will stay on here and die here if necessary, but I will not leave Bengal till the hatchet is finally buried and even a solitary Hindu girl is not afraid to move freely about in the midst of Mussalmans.

"The greatest help you can give me is to banish fear from your hearts," he told them. And what was the talisman that could do that for them? It was his unfailing *mantra* of *Ramanama*. "You may say you do not believe in him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him Ishwar, Allah, God, Ahura Mazda. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master."

He touchingly described to them how as a little boy he used to be usually timid and afraid of even shadows and how his nurse Rambha had taught him the secret of *Ramanama* as an antidote to fear. "When in fear take *Ramanama*. He will protect you," she used to tell him. Ever since then *Ramanama* had been his unfailing refuge and shelter from all kinds of fear.

"He resided in the heart of the pure always. Tulsidas, that prince of devotees, whose name has become a household word among the Hindus from Kashmir to Cape Comorin as Shri Chaitanya's and Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa's in Bengal, has presented the message of that name to us

in his immortal Ramayana. If you walk in fear of that name, you need fear no man on earth, be he a prince or a pauper." Why should they be afraid of the cry of 'Alla ho Akbar'? The Allah of Islam was the protector of innocence. What had been done in East Bengal had not the sanction of Islam as preached by its Prophet.

Who could dare to dishonour their wives or daughters, if they had faith in God? He, therefore, expected them to cease to be afraid of Mussalmans. If they believed in *Ramanama* they must not think of leaving East Bengal. They must live where they were born and brought up and die there if necessary, defending their honour as brave men and women. "To run away from danger, instead of facing it, is to deny one's faith in man and God and even one's own self. It were better for one to drown oneself than live to declare such bankruptcy of faith."

Why should they feel secure only under the protection of the police and the military? "If you ask the military, they will tell you that 'God' is their protector. I want you, therefore, to be able to tell Shamsuddin Saheb that you no longer need the protection of the police and the military which may be withdrawn, but would rather put yourself under the protection of Him, whose protection they all seek."

AT CHAUMUHANI

Chaumuhani has normally a population of not more than 5,000. But at the evening prayer gathering held here in the compound of the Hindu Vidya Mandir on the first day of Gandhiji's arrival, there was a gathering of not less than 15,000. Large numbers had come from places round about Chaumuhani. About eighty per cent of these were Muslims. The town itself remained free from the worst communal excesses, but round about it the whole area had been ablaze. Speaking after the prayer, Gandhiji poured out his soul to the gathering particularly to the Muslim section, for over twenty minutes. He told them how he had toured East Bengal in the company of the Ali Brothers during the Khilafat days. In those days the Muslims felt that all that he said was right. If the Ali Brothers went into a women's meeting they went blindfolded. He was

allowed to go with his eyes open. Why should he blindfold himself when he went to his mothers and sisters ? He had no desire to go among the purdah ladies. But the Ali Brothers insisted that he must go. The women were eager to meet him and they were sure that his advice would do good to them. In South Africa he had lived in the midst of Muslim friends for twenty years. They treated him as a member of their family and told their wives and sisters that they need not observe purdah with him. He had become a barrister in England but what was a dinner barrister worth ? It was South Africa and the struggle that he had launched there that had made him. It was there that he discovered Satyagraha and civil disobedience.

He had come to them in sadness. What sin had Mother India committed that her children, Hindus and Muslims, were quarrelling with each other ? He had learnt that no Hindu woman was safe today in some parts of East Bengal. Ever since he had come to Bengal, he had been hearing awful tales of atrocities. Saheed Sahab, their Prime Minister, and Shamsuddin Sahab had admitted that there was some truth in the reports that one heard.

"I have not come to excite the Hindus to fight the Mussalmans. I have no enemies. I have fought the British all my life. Yet they are my friends. I have never wished them ill."

These incidents were a blot on the name of Islam. "I have studied the *Quran*. The very word Islam means peace. The Muslim greeting *Salaam Alaikum* is the same for all, whether Hindus or Muslims, or any other. Nowhere does Islam allow such things as had happened in Noakhali and Tipperah." Saheed Sahab and all the Ministers and League leaders who met him in Calcutta had condemned such acts unequivocally. "The Muslims are in such overwhelming majority in East Bengal that I expect them to constitute themselves the guardians of the small Hindu minority. They should tell Hindu women that while they are there, no one dare cast an evil eye on them."

It was time for *namaz* when Gandhiji finished speaking. As usual, his address was going to be explained to the gathering in Bengali when there was a clamour from the Muslim section of the audience for a brief

recess to enable them to perform their *namaz* and come back in time to hear the translation in Bengali. This was done. The *namaz* was performed in one corner of the compound after which they all came and heard the address rendered into Bengali by Shri Satish Chandra Das Gupta.

A MUSLIM MINISTER SPEAKS

Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed addressed the gathering after the prayer on the next day. He spoke forcefully in Bengali for over half an hour. He warned them that if the issue of Pakistan versus Hindustan was going to be settled by mutual slaughter of the Hindus where Muslims were in a majority and *vice versa* there would be neither Pakistan nor Hindustan, but only slavery. If they really wanted Pakistan, it was up to the Muslims of Noakhali who constituted seventyfive per cent of the population to guarantee the safety and security of the twentyfive per cent Hindu minority living in their midst. No Government that was worth its name could stand silently by and let the majority community oppress or exterminate the minority community. Neither the Muslim League Government of Bengal nor the Congress Government of Bihar could tolerate what had happened of late in these provinces respectively. By doing what they had done in Bengal they had driven the Muslim League Ministry to employ the military against the civil population of East Bengal with all that it implied. The Muslim League never sanctioned arson, looting, abduction, forcible conversion or forcible marriages. All that was un-Islamic. The Quran clearly stated that there can be no compulsion in religion. He was there to declare to them that a forcible conversion was no conversion at all nor had a forcible marriage any validity and these mock marriages and conversions should be deemed to have made no difference whatsoever in the *status quo* of the persons concerned. Force settled nothing. America had devised the Atom Bomb and with its help crushed its opponents. But had it brought peace to the world? In Noakhali it was the Mussalmans who had oppressed the Hindus and it was up to them to wipe off that blot from the fair name of Islam. He appealed to the Mussalmans of Noakhali to set the Hindus at their ease and restore confidence to them so that they might return to their homes

with a feeling of security. They could have no heart to cast their lot with the miscreants who must pay the penalty for their crimes and it was the duty of the Muslims in general to help the authorities to trace them and bring them to book. What was done was done. He hoped that out of the ashes of the conflagration the edifice of abiding Hindu-Muslim unity would be rebuilt in Bengal.

BROTHER'S KEEPERS

That night Shamsuddin Saheb with his colleagues from Calcutta and some local prominent Muslims saw Gandhiji and discussed the question of refugees, particularly the question of persuading them to return to their respective villages. One of the friends suggested that in order to restore confidence Hindu leaders should reinforce the appeals of the Muslims to the refugees to go back to their villages. Gandhiji replied that was not the right way to dispel the apprehension and distrust of the Hindus which was well-grounded. He would not be able to advise them to return to their homes unless there was at least one good Hindu and one good Mussalman for each village who would stand guarantee for their safety and security and who would be prepared to immolate himself before a hair of their head was touched. It was for the Muslim League leaders who were also members of the Government to say whether such men would be forthcoming. There was no other way to restore confidence after all that had happened. They all agreed to Gandhiji's suggestion and said that they would do their best to give effect to it.

VII

INTO THE HEART OF TROUBLE

Gandhiji did not stop long at Chaumuhani, although his physical condition had worsened on account of the reduction in his diet. He was anxious to see for himself the devastation wrought by communal madness and to clear the atmosphere of terror and re-establish mutual confidence and goodwill. By an irony of fate, Noakhali had had a bumper crop almost ready to be harvested. But many of those who owned it had been either killed or had fled. The outstanding problem was how to get them back to their homes over which hung a suffocating atmosphere of terror and distrust. These stood in the way of repatriation and rehabilitation, and it was Gandhiji's mission to clear, purify and sweeten it. "For myself," he declared, "I have come to stay in East Bengal till there is reconciliation between the two."

GOPAIRBAG

On the 8th November Gandhiji, accompanied by two Parliamentary Secretaries of Bengal's League Ministry Khwaja Nasrullah and Maulvi Abdur Rashid, Mr. McInerny, the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, Noakhali, moved from Chaumuhani to the village of Gopairbag. Here, in the midst of thick groves of arecanut and cocoanut palms, are scattered five clusters of huts occupied by Hindu families, in the midst of nearly fifty times that number of Muslim families. One of these is a Patwari's house. The loveliness of nature was spread all around. The air was delightfully fresh and cool. But the human scene that met the eye froze one's blood. There had been murder and arson. Charred remains of what was once flesh and blood bore witness to the grim tragedy. There were bloodstains on the doorsteps of some of the houses. The *kutcha* floors in many houses had been dug up presumably in search of hidden cash or jewels. The odour of death still hung over the place. It was a picture of desolation. Three girls had been abducted from the house, two of whom were still missing. ,

DATTAPARA

On his way back at evening Gandhiji halted at Diwanbari at Dattapara where tact and presence of mind combined with good luck had enabled the Diwanji family to escape from the fate of the Patwari family at Gopairbag. The place itself has at present been turned into a refugee camp holding about 6000 refugees. Gandhiji discussed here with the district authorities the question of repatriation of the refugees to their respective homes. Some local Muslim League members had also been invited and took part in the discussion.

Addressing a meeting of Hindus and Muslims at evening, Gandhiji told them that it was a shame for both the Hindus and the Mussalmans that the Hindus should have to run away from their homes as they had done. It was a shame for the Muslims because it was out of fear of the Muslims that the Hindus had run away. Why should a human being inspire another with fear? It was no less a shame for the Hindus to have given way to craven fear. He had always said that man should fear none but God. The Government officials accompanying him were all anxious that they should return to their homes. To feed and clothe thousands in one place involved difficulties for the refugees as well as for the Government. The Government officials were ashamed of the fact that such things should have happened in their jurisdiction. He wanted them to forgive and forget what had happened in Noakhali and Tipperah. That did not mean that they were to become cowards. But it served no useful purpose to keep on recalling the unpleasant past. He hoped and prayed that the Hindus and Muslims of these parts would become friends once more. He knew the Hindus had suffered a lot and were suffering still. He would not ask them to return to their homes till at least one good Muslim and one good Hindu came forward to accompany them and stand surety for their safety in each village. He was sure there were plenty of good Hindus and good Muslims in these parts who would give the necessary guarantee.

A Muslim friend from the audience said they had already given them the assurance that they would look after them but the Hindus would

not listen to them. Gandhiji replied that they should try to understand and appreciate the reasons of the Hindus' distrust and overcome their fear. A Hindu refugee got up and asked how they could have confidence in the assurances of the Muslims any more. When the trouble was threatening they had promised to look after them but had failed to protect them afterwards. Besides where were they to go and stay? They had lost their all. Were they to go back and stay in the jungles? And when fifty good Muslims in the village had failed to save them on the previous occasion, how would one good Muslim do so now?

Gandhiji replied that the Government would see that their huts were rebuilt and they had food and clothing when they returned to their homes. Whatever might have happened in the past, if now one good Muslim and one good Hindu took the responsibility for their safety in each village, they could rely on their word, backed as it would be by the collective invitation of all the Muslims in the village. If they were still afraid they were cowards and not even God could help the cowardly.

AN APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE

The next day Gandhiji shifted his camp to Dattapara in order to be able to visit more affected villages in the interior. After the evening prayer he addressed a huge gathering in which about 80% were Muslims. It was a passionate appeal to their conscience. He talked to them of the purifying alchemy of God's name which was more potent even than the proverbial philosopher's stone. He asked them to search their hearts and tell him whether they really wanted the Hindus to come back and live in their midst as friends and neighbours. If they wanted them back, they should stand guarantee for their safety and self-respect, assure them that their daughters, sisters, and mothers would be regarded like the Muslims' own daughters, sisters and mothers. If not, they should plainly tell him so and he would ask the unfortunate refugees to migrate. But he himself would stay in their midst till their hearts were converted, live on what they might provide him and die there if necessary.

The following is the text of Gandhiji's speech delivered in Hindustani at the prayer meeting at Dattapara on the evening of the 10th November :

"Whether you believe me or not, I want to assure you that I am a servant of both the Hindus and the Mussalmans. I have not come here to fight Pakistan. If India is destined to be partitioned, I cannot prevent it. But I wish to tell you that Pakistan cannot be established by force. In the *bhajan* that was just sung the poet has likened God to the philosopher's stone. The proverbial philosopher's stone is said to turn iron into gold. That is not always desirable. For instance, if all the rails of the railway track were turned into gold by the touch of the stone, the trains would not be able to run over them. But the touch of God purifies the soul. That is always desirable.

"That philosopher's stone is within us all. All that I wish to tell my Muslim brethren is that, whether they live as one people or two, they should live as friends with the Hindus. If they do not wish to do so, they should say so plainly. I would in that case confess myself defeated. The refugees cannot stay on as refugees for ever. The Government cannot go on feeding them. And what sort of food are they getting? Less than half the daily ration of cereals to keep an able-bodied man alive, no fish, no vegetables, nor anything else to supplement it. It is not possible for them to exist like this for any length of time. If, therefore, the Muslims do not want them back in their village, they must go elsewhere.

"But even if every Hindu of East Bengal went away, I will still continue to live amidst the Muslims of East Bengal and eat what they give me and what I consider lawful for me to partake of. I will not bring my food from outside. I do not need fish or flesh. All that I need is a little fruit, vegetables and some goat's milk. As far as goat's milk and cereals are concerned, I would take them again only when it pleases God that I should do so. I have given it up and would not resume it till the Hindus were really penitent of what they had done in Bihar.

"For a thousand Hindus to surround a hundred Mussalmans or for a thousand Mussalmans to surround a hundred Hindus and oppress them is not bravery but cowardice. A fair fight means even numbers

and previous notice. That does not mean that I approve of their fighting. It has been said that the Hindus and the Muslims cannot stay together as friends or co-operate with each other. No one can make me believe that, but if that is your belief, you should say so. I would in that case not ask the Hindus to return to their homes. They would leave East Bengal and it would be a shame for both the Mussalmans and the Hindus. If, on the other hand, you want the Hindus to stay in your midst, you should tell them that they need not look to the military for protection but to their Muslim brethren instead. Their daughters and sisters and mothers are your own daughters, sisters and mothers and you should protect them with your lives. I addressed them in the refugee camp yesterday. The District Magistrate Mr. McInerny told them that all mankind being descended from Adam and Eve, they were all members of one family—relatives, whatever their race or religion. So they should live together as relatives.

"One man is said to have returned to his village last evening after the prayer meeting. He found his house surrounded by Muslims. They would not let him take his property. How can I, under these circumstances (if they are true), ask anyone to go back? You should ponder over what I have said and let me know what you really wish. I shall advise the Hindus accordingly.

"I am told and I believe that there are many good Muslims who would welcome the Hindus back but the *goondas* stand in the way. I wish to tell you that if the good Muslims spoke out with one voice and acted according to their professions, the so-called *goondas* would become ineffective and would mend their ways."

Several written questions were submitted to him at the end of the meeting. One of them was : how could the refugees have the confidence to go back when the hooligans who had harassed them were still at large? Gandhiji replied that it was the duty of the Government to round up the hooligans but his advice to the refugees was to leave the Government to attend to its duty. If the good Muslims invited them back wholeheartedly, they should return.

FARTHER INTO THE INTERIOR.

The 11th was Gandhij's day of silence. All the same he visited the villages Noakhola, Sonachak and Khilpara, all in the Lakhimpur Thana. The journey was partly by motor and partly by boats which were punted with difficulty in *khals* choked with thickly tangled masses of water hyacinth. At Noakhola 8 people were said to have been murdered, including a schoolboy of 15. Four skulls and charred remains of the bones were scattered all over the place. The houses had almost all been burnt down. In the house where the boy was murdered his school books and freshly written exercise books were strewn over the floor. The betel nut and the cocoanut trees surrounding the houses were scorched. Those that were not killed or did not run away were said to have been converted, including a deaf mute who by piteous signs showed the tuft of hair in a piece of cloth which had been removed from his head and to which he still clung. The few women that remained were all weeping and wailing in a heart-rending manner. At Sonachak the place of worship had been desecrated and set fire to. In this village, too, the same piteous weeping and wailing of women met Gandhiji.

In a written message that was read out at the evening prayer gathering Gandhiji poured out the anguish which the sights which he had seen had filled him with. Wherever he had gone he had seen burnt houses and heard stories of looting and forcible conversions. Hindu women were without the auspicious vermilion mark on their heads and foreheads and without their conch shell bangles. How he wished that all Muslim brothers would condemn these atrocities with one voice so that the Hindus could go back to their homes and live there as they used to before the disturbances. Their houses would be rebuilt before they could go back. The Muslims should help in that. Such he believed was the injunction of the holy *Quran* too.

The next day at the evening prayer gathering which mostly consisted of refugees, Gandhiji again referred to the question of repatriation. The Muslim Vice-President of Union No. 6 who had addressed them before him, had invited them in the name of the Mussalmans to return to their

homes. But it was not so easy in action as it was in speech. Everyone was anxious to see the two communities live in peace and harmony once again. For that it was not necessary that they should have the same religion. He had seen awful sights of destruction. He had seen the terror-stricken faces of the sufferers. They had been forcibly converted once and they were afraid the same thing would be repeated. He wanted them to shed that fear. He alone deserved to live who refused to give up God's name. They must learn to face death rather than give up *Ramnam*. He was not enamoured of the military and the police. The function of the police was to arrest thieves and dacoits, that of the military to guard them against foreign aggression. The police and the military could not teach them to cease fighting among themselves and live as friends. He referred to the scheme for repatriation but it could work only if the Muslim League wished to have peace and fully co-operated. Shamsuddin Saheb was coming in two or three days. They would hear from him what the League Government wanted to do.

Visits to the village of Gomatoli and Nandigram completed Gandhiji's programme in the Lakhimpur Thana. In Nandigram the same scene of devastation that was seen in Noakhola and Khilpara confronted one. About 600 houses had been burnt down. Twisted and blackened pieces of corrugated sheets that once constituted roofings littered the ground among heaps of cinders and debris. A school building, a hostel and a hospital were reduced to ashes. Scorched cocoanut and arecanut palms marked the site of arson. The temple belonging to the leading family of the village had been desecrated here too.

KAZIRKHIL

Gandhiji shifted his camp from Dattapara to Kazirkhil on the 14th afternoon. On the way he stopped at Shahpur where a public meeting had been arranged. Gandhiji had been told that there would be a big gathering at Shahpur. But some had spread the rumour that he would be accompanied by the Superintendent of Police, the District Magistrate and an armed guard who would utilize the occasion for making arrests with the result that very few people were in evidence when Gan-

dhiji arrived there. "It is a cruel joke," remarked Gandhiji. For so far as he was concerned he had never wanted any police or district authority to accompany him. But the authorities said they could not take the risk of letting him go about unprotected.

It had been brought to his notice that in several places, while the local Mussalmans professed to be anxious that peace should be re-established, they were not prepared to do anything for it or give any guarantee, unless the Muslim League leaders asked them to. Gandhiji, recognizing the reasonableness of their suggestion, referred to a statement of Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah which he had read that morning. He did not like everything in that statement but there were some things in it which should commend themselves to all. In that statement Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah had said: "If the Mussalmans lose their balance and give vent to the spirit of vengeance and retaliation and prove false to the highest codes of morality and preachings of our great religion Islam, you will not only lose your title to the claim of Pakistan but also it will start a most vicious circle of bloodshed and cruelty, which will at once put off the day of our freedom and we shall only be helping to prolong the period of slavery and bondage." He had further said: "We must prove politically that we are brave, generous and trustworthy,..... that in the Pakistan areas the minorities will enjoy the fullest security of life, property and honour just as the Mussalmans themselves, nay even greater." He would like them, remarked Gandhiji, to ponder over that statement, if on examination they found that his quotation was correct. Murder, loot, arson, abduction and forcible marriages and forcible conversions could not but prolong India's slavery, if they kept on quarrelling among themselves. If they looked to the police and the military for protection, they would be inciting the third party to rule over them.

At Kazirkhil Gandhiji's camp was fixed up in a partially devastated house. The miscreants were not able to burn down the place completely. An advance party of Shri Satish Babu's men had cleaned it up and made it habitable. There was a small gathering for the prayers in the compound of the house. Addressing them after prayer on the 14th Novem-

ber, Gandhiji said he found indescribable peace in the natural scenery around him but he found that peace missing on the faces of the men and women. And how could they have peace after all that they had been through? He found a number of guards standing there to protect him and his party. Against whom were they to protect him? He was not used to going about with a guard. He had toured in Bengal unprotected before this. "But to-day the authorities would not let me do so. It is a matter of sorrow and shame for me and more than me it should be a matter of shame for the Mussalmans of East Bengal."

Even the schools and temples had been destroyed, he proceeded. Shamsuddin Saheb, their Minister, did not like it. The happenings in East Bengal, he said, had hurt him deeply. The hearts of the people had to be purged of hatred. For that their (the Mussalmans') help and co-operation was necessary.

This fratricide was more awful than anything in his experience, he said. He had carried on a grim struggle for 20 years in South Africa and for the last 30 years in India. But this mutual slaughter had non-plussed him. He did not know how he could induce the two communities to live in peace and harmony again. He had come to Bengal to find a solution for the problem. Bengal was a big province. If the communal problem could be solved here, it would be solved elsewhere also. If he succeeded here, he would go away from Bengal with a new lease of life. If not, he wished God to remove him from this earth. He did not wish to leave Bengal empty-handed. The word "pessimism" was not to be found in his dictionary.

The Muslims butchered the Hindus and did worse things than butchery in Bengal, he proceeded, and the Hindus butchered the Muslims in Bihar. When both acted wickedly it was no use making comparisons or saying one was less wicked than the other or who started the trouble. If they wished to take revenge they should learn the art from him. He also took revenge, but it was of a different type. He had read a Gujarati poem in his childhood which said: "If to him who gives you a glass of water, you give two, there is no merit in it. Real merit lies in doing good to him who does you evil." "That," concluded Gandhiji, "I consider noble revenge."

He had read a story about one of the earlier Caliphs. A man attacked the Caliph with a sword. The Caliph wrested the sword from the assailant's hands and was going to kill him when the assailant spat on his face. The Caliph thereupon let him go free because the indignity had filled him with personal anger. This produced a great impression upon the assailant and he embraced Islam. One who was forcibly converted to Islam ceased to be a man. To recite the *Kalama* through fear was meaningless.

RAMGANJ

The prayer meeting of the 15th was held in the *maidan* in front of the school building at Ramganj. In his address after the prayer Gandhiji reiterated and emphasized his previous day's appeal. He could talk to them of nothing but sorrow and suffering these days. Wherever he went he saw awful sights of destruction. There were no tears in his eyes. He who shed tears could not wipe those of others, but his heart did weep. He had come with the hope that he could have a frank talk with the Mussalmans and that they would repent of their misdeeds and request the Hindus not to leave their homes. If the repentance was genuine, the Hindus would recognize their sincerity and regain lost confidence. But he could see that the Hindus and the Muslims of East Bengal had been embittered against one another. He would not go into the reasons thereof. But the Muslim brethren would permit him to say that so far as he knew, in East Bengal they had been the aggressors. The Hindus were mortally afraid of them.

At Chaumuhani, continued Gandhiji, Muslims came to his meeting larger than the Hindus. But he did not know why they were avoiding him after the first meeting at Dattapara. It hurt him. He wanted the few Mussalmans who were present in the meeting to carry his message to the rest. A Muslim sister who had been going about meeting the leading Muslims in these parts had said that the Muslims told her plainly that they wanted orders from the League leaders before they could promise to befriend the Hindus or attend Gandhiji's meetings. The exodus of the Hindus was still continuing. If the

Muslims assured them that they were neighbours, friends and brothers, sons of the same soil, breathing the same air and drinking the same water that the Hindus had nothing to fear from them, the exodus would stop and even those who had left their homes would return. Even animals were friendly to those who befriended them. But man was made in the image of God. To justify his inheritance, man had to return good for evil. Whosoever was the fault, this truth applied to both the parties. The Muslims wanted orders from the League. He could understand it. There was a League Government in the province. But that did not mean that the Government should be inimical to those outside the League.

He reiterated what he said about Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah Saheb's message on the previous day. They should search their hearts and ask themselves if they had lived up to that message. "So far as I know, Islam does not permit forcible conversion and atrocities on women. What good can a mere repetition of the *Kalama* do to one whose heart does not accept Islam? You should ask your leaders, therefore, whether you are to be friends with the Hindus or enemies and tell me. If you wish to be enemies, the Hindus should be asked to leave East Bengal. For myself, I have come to stay in East Bengal till there is reconciliation between the two."

AN OUTSPOKEN UTTERANCE

Maulvi Abdul Goffran, Minister for Civil Supplies, and the Minister for Agriculture, Maulvi Ahmed Hussain with a number of Parliamentary Secretaries and Muslim League members met Gandhiji on the evening of the 16th to discuss with him the rehabilitation proposals of the Government. After the prayers Maulvi Goffran, a native of Noakhali District where he had served as Public Prosecutor before he became Minister, addressed the gathering. He was deeply pained, he said, by what had happened in the District and so were the Mussalmans of East Bengal. He had toured in the affected area from the 16th and could say that the happenings occurred between the 10th and the 16th. There was no doubt that excesses had been committed in East Bengal. He was most anxious that the miscreants should be brought to book, only he did not want the innocent to suffer. He assured the Hindus of East Bengal that neither

the Government nor the Muslim League wanted the Hindus to go away from East Bengal just as the Congress did not wish the Muslims in Bihar, United Provinces, Central Provinces, Madras and Bombay to leave their homes and go somewhere else. The League wanted to prove that it knew how to run the Government justly by according equal treatment to the Hindus and the Muslims. How could they think of leaving East Bengal where they were born and brought up? The Hindus and the Mussalmans had always lived together as friends. The Hindus called him 'bhai', 'uncle' and so on. Why should there be enmity between the two now? He requested them on behalf of the Mussalmans to return to their homes without any fear. When their confidence came back the military and the police would be sent away as neither the Hindus nor the Mussalmans had much faith in them. He desired that the Muslims should entreat the Hindus to go back to their homes.

At this point the speech was interrupted for a few minutes as it was time for *Namaz*. As at Chaumuhani, the *Namaz* was performed on the outskirts of the prayer gathering where the Muslim members of the audience repaired. After the *Namaz* Goffran Saheb spoke for a few minutes again. He told the audience that orders had been passed not to arrest anyone while coming to Gandhiji's meeting, at the meeting, or while returning home from the meeting.

Gandhiji, addressing the meeting after Maulvi Goffran Saheb, began by referring to Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed's speech at Chaumuhani a few days ago. They had now heard Goffran Saheb. The Ministers wanted them to live together as friends. The police and the military could not protect them. God alone could protect them. They had, therefore, to look to each other for their safety. Goffran Saheb had told them that the Government did not wish the Hindus to leave East Bengal. Awful things had no doubt happened but they should let bygones be bygones. They must turn a new leaf. When one had suffered as they had, one was liable to become filled with suspicion. But that had to be overcome. A member from the audience had requested him, said Gandhiji,, to allow him five minutes to reply to Goffran Saheb's speech which

he said, required correction in several places. But Gandhiji replied that he was afraid he could not allow the meeting to be turned into a public debate. Whatever was said at the meeting was said in good faith and to do his work. But if the friend in question sent him a letter, not couched offensively, he would gladly forward it to Goffran Saheb. He rebuked the audience, too, for not observing complete silence while the Muslim members of the audience were performing *namaz*. Culture and good breeding required that they should observe silence when others said their prayers. There should be mutual respect. All worshipped the same God, whatever their religion. He was glad to see the Congress and the League flags flying together in the prayer ground. Both had great significance. They should realize, as Qaid-e-Azam Jinnah Saheb had said, that if they kept on quarrelling among themselves the country would remain a slave country and Pakistan would vanish into thin air. He was receiving threatening letters, said Gandhiji. Some Muslims feared that he had come to suppress them. He could assure them that he had never suppressed any one in all his life. They asked him why he had not gone to Bihar. He had declared his resolve to fast if Bihar did not stop the madness. He was in constant touch with Bihar. Pandit Jawaharlalji, Doctor Rajendra Prasad and others had assured him that his presence there was not required. Bihar, he understood, was practically peaceful now. Tension was still there, but it was going. The Muslims were returning to their villages. The Government had taken the responsibility to build the houses of those who had been rendered homeless. He was also receiving angry telegrams from Hindus asking why he did not fast against the Muslims for the happenings in Bengal. He could not do so to-day. If the Mussalmans realized that he was their friend, he would be entitled to fast against them also. If he was to leave East Bengal he would go only after peace ruled the breasts of the Hindus and the Muslims. He had no desire to live any longer otherwise.

DASGHARIA

On the morning of the 17th Gandhiji visited the village of Das-

gharia, two miles from Kazirkhil, where he was met by a large number of women. They had all been forcibly converted and now reverted to their own religion. The District Magistrate had issued orders and advertized the fact, remarked Gandhiji, that forcible conversions, i. e. conversions out of fear, would not be recognized by law. Gandhiji added he did not know if everyone of those who had been converted forcibly had been restored to Hinduism. If not, it should be done if they wanted to replace the present bitterness between the two communities by cordiality.

Some abducted girls were still missing. They should be returned without further delay. A *dhobi* had brought to him his boy of one year this afternoon. He had recovered the child after a month from a Muslim with police help. It was the duty of the Muslim brethren to put an end to such acts. They should make a frank confession of error in the past and promise to avoid it in future. He who tried to hide his mistakes, could never rectify them. He himself was a votary of truth. Even when he practised law, he told his clients to tell him the truth if they wanted him to take up their case. He would not plead for a false case. The result was that only true and *bona fide* cases were brought to him. He had long ceased to practise law and had even been struck off the rolls of the Bar register for the offence of sedition. But he continued to follow the same principle. His advice to the Hindus and the Muslims was to get rid of all evil in themselves. Without that they would not be able to live in peace or have respect for one another.

Gandhiji's remarks at the prayer meeting which Minister Goffran had addressed the previous day had some curious repercussions. At the prayer gathering on the 17th evening no woman came and very few Hindus, the majority of those present being Muslims. Speaking after the prayer, Gandhiji observed that he had heard that because he did not allow a gentleman to reply to Goffran Saheb's remarks there and then in the meeting, the Hindus were annoyed and had boycotted the meeting. He was unrepentant. He never said or did anything merely to please others. He had always taught that one should do one's duty irrespective of the reaction

it may have on others. A man who always did what he believed to be right never feared anyone.

Later the Secretary of the local Relief Organization came to him and told him that they had not boycotted the meeting but as it was Sunday and the bazaar-day the women were afraid to come out as there would be many Muslims, including *goondas*, about.

MADHUPUR

Speaking at the prayer meeting on the 19th evening which was held at Madhupur, Gandhiji observed that a friend had told him that the explanation was a make believe. If they had boycotted the meeting, he did not mind it. They owed him no apology on that account. And if they had stayed away out of fear, certainly no apology was due to him. But it was a shame for them to be so afraid. Were the men also such cowards that they had stayed away out of fear? Were the Muslims going to eat them up? If they were such cowards, they were not worthy of living in this country. The sister who had gone to him in the morning to request him to hold a women's meeting at Madhupur had put before him three questions. The first question was that in spite of all their efforts they were unable to rescue some of the abducted women. He had told her that she should write to him about it and he would forward the letter to Saheed Suhrawardy. He could even write to the Prime Minister directly. It was a matter which brooked no delay.

Secondly, she said there were some women in the villages who wanted to come away but they wanted a military escort. He never could be a party to that. He had told the Prime Minister that he for one was not enamoured of the police and the military and that he could withdraw it at any time. The Hindus and the Muslims should be free to break each other's heads if they wanted to. He would put up with that. But if they continued to look to the police and the military for help, they would remain slaves for ever. Those who preferred security to freedom had no right to live. He wanted the women to become brave. To change one's religion under threat of force

was no conversion but rather cowardice. A cowardly man or woman was a deadweight on any religion. Out of fear they might become Muslims to-day, Christians to-morrow and pass into a third religion the day after. That was not worthy of human beings. It was up to the men workers to tell the women that they would be their escort and would protect them with their lives. If still the women were afraid to come away, there was no help for them. He had come to proclaim from the housetops that the women had to become brave or else die. They should make use of the calamity that had befallen them to cast out the demon of fear.

Lastly, the sister had asked as to how they could advise the refugees to go back to their homes. He would not ask them, replied Gandhiji, to go back under police or military protection. They had run away out of fear of the Muslims. Therefore, it was the Muslims who had to come forward and reassure them that they would regard them as their own mothers, daughters and sisters and protect them with their lives. Everybody, continued Gandhiji, must be entitled to retain his or her own religion without interference. All worshipped the same God although under different names. "If I see my God in this tree and worship it, why should the Muslims object?" It was wrong for anyone to say that his God was superior to that of another's. God was one and the same for all. Hence his formula that from every village one good Hindu and one good Muslim should stand surely for the peace of the village. Then and then alone would he ask the refugees to return. And the Ministers had liked his suggestion.

VIII

THE LESSON OF FEARLESSNESS

Mr. McNerny, the District Magistrate of Noakhali, addressing Gandhiji's evening prayer gathering at Diwanbari (Dattapara) on November 8, made a pithy remark. As after a natural calamity like an earthquake, floods or an epidemic involving large masses of people, so after riots the first requisites of rehabilitation and relief were food, clothing, shelter and primary medical aid. But of far greater importance than these was courage which was the basis of all virtues. Nothing could have been more opportune, he added, than Gandhi's visit to Noakhali at the present juncture. For, courage could not be doled out like rice or other items of relief. It had to be evoked from within and who could do it better than Gandhiji ?

Gandhiji had anticipated him in that regard even before he had set foot on the soil of the Tipperah District. The first lesson was delivered at Chandpur when a group of 20 to 25 workers, including the son of the late Babu Hardayal Nag and several representatives of various relief organizations, met him in the dining saloon of the *Kiwi* on the morning of the 7th November. "What goes against the grain in me," Gandhiji told them, "is that a single individual can be forcibly converted or a single woman can be kidnapped or raped. So long as we feel we can be subjected to these indignities, we shall continue to be so subjected. If we say we cannot do without police or military protection, we really confess defeat even before the battle has begun. No police or military in the world can protect people who are cowards. To-day you say, thousands of people are terrorizing a mere handful, so what can the latter do ? But even a few individuals are enough to terrorize the whole mass, if the latter feel helpless. Your trouble is not numerical inferiority but the feeling of helplessness that has seized you and the habit of depending on others. The remedy lies with you. That is, too,

why I am opposed to the idea of your evacuating from East Bengal *en masse*. It is no cure for impotence or helplessness."

"East Bengal is opposed to such a move," they replied.

"They should not leave," Gandhiji resumed. "20,000 able-bodied men prepared to die like brave men non-violently might to-day be regarded as a fairy tale. But it would be no fairy tale for every able-bodied man in a population of 20,000 to die like stalwart soldiers to a man in open fight. They will go down in history like the immortal five hundred of Leonidas who made Thermopylae." And he quoted the proud epitaph which marked the grave of the Thermopylae heroes :

Stranger ! Tell Sparta, here her sons are laid,
Such was her law and we that law obeyed.

"I will proclaim from the housetops," he continued, "that it is the only condition under which you can live in East Bengal. You have asked for Hindu officers, Hindu police and Hindu military in the place of Muslim. It is a false cry. You forget that Hindu officers, Hindu police and Hindu military have in the past done all these things—looting, arson, abduction, rape. I come from Kathiawad—the land of petty principalities. I cannot describe to you to what depths of depravity human nature can go. No woman's honour is safe in some principalities and the chief is no hooligan but a duly anointed one."

"These are cases of individual depravity. Here we have got this on a mass scale."

"But the individual there is not alone. He is backed by the machinery of his little State."

"He is condemned even by his compeers. Here such acts are not condemned by the Muslims."

"I have heard nothing but condemnation of these acts from Sahced Suhrawardy downwards since I have come here. Words of condemnation may tickle your ears. But they are no consolation to the unfortunate women whose houses have been laid desolate or who have been abducted, forcibly converted and forcibly married.

"What a shame for Hindus, what a disgrace for Islam," he exclaimed, warming up. "No, I am not going to leave you in peace. Presently you will say to yourself, 'When will this man leave us and go?' But this man will not go. He did not come on your invitation and he will go on his own only, but with your blessings, when his mission in East Bengal is fulfilled."

"It is a part of their plan for Pakistan," put in one member of the deputation.

"It is midsummer madness and they have realized it. They will soon sicken of it. They have already begun to."

"Why do not they come here then and set this right?"

"That stage will come. Sickness only marks the crisis. Convalescence must precede cure." "You see I am a nature-curst," he added with a laugh in which all joined.

"But here we are a mere drop in the ocean," remarked another friend resuming the discussion.

Gandhiji replied that even if there was one Hindu in East Bengal he wanted him to have the courage to go and live in the midst of the Mussalmans and die if he must like a hero. He should refuse to live as a serf and a slave. He might not have the non-violent strength to die without fighting. But he could command their admiration if he had the courage not to submit to wrong and died fighting like a man. "There is not a man, however cruel and hard-hearted, but would give his admiration to a brave man. A *goonda* is not the vile man he is imagined to be. He is not without his noble traits."

The friend who was leading the argument however was still sceptical. "A *goonda* does not understand reason," he said.

"But he understands bravery," replied Gandhiji. "If he finds that you are braver than he, he will respect you."

"You will note," continued Gandhiji, "that for the purposes of our present discussion I have not asked you to discard the use of arms. I can't provide you with arms. It is not for me to provide arms to the Chittagong Armoury Raid men," he remarked chaffing them. "The most

tragic thing about the armoury raid people," he added, "is that they could not even multiply themselves. Their bravery was lop-sided. It did not infect others."

That started a discussion on the Chittagong Armoury Raid group.

"No wonder it could not," answered one of the party. "They were condemned."

"By whom? I may have—that is a different thing."

"The people did do. I am myself an Armoury Raid man."

"They did not. You are no Armoury Raid man, or you should not have been here to tell these things. That so many of them should have remained living witnesses of the things that have happened is in my eyes a tragedy of the first order. If they had shown the same fearlessness and courage to face death in the present crisis as they did when they made that raid, they would have gone down in history as heroes. As it is, they have only inscribed a small footnote in the page of history. You will see I am not, as I have already said, asking you just now to unlearn the use of arms or to follow my type of heroism. I have come here to test it in East Bengal. I want you to take up the conventional type of heroism. You should be able to infect others—both men and women—with courage and fearlessness to face death when the alternative is dishonour and humiliation. Then the Hindus can stay in East Bengal, not otherwise. After all, the Mussalmans are blood of our blood and bone of our bone."*

"Here the proportion of Mussalmans to Hindus is 6 to 1. How can you expect us to stand against such heavy odds?"

"When India was brought under British subjection, there were 70,000 European soldiers against 33 crores of Indians."

"We have no arms. The Government backs them with its bayonets."

*At least one Armoury Raid man sacrificed his life in the effort to stop the fratricide in Noakhali. This martyr was Lalmohan Sen who was murdered along with his companions in Sandwip towards the end of October.—*Editor*.

"The odds were much heavier against the Indians in South Africa. The Indian community there was a mere handful in the midst of an overwhelming majority of Europeans and Negroes. The Europeans had arms. We had none. So we forged the weapon of Satyagraha. To-day the Indian is respected by the white man in South Africa, not so the Zulu with all his fine physique."

"So we are to fight with arms anyhow?" the friend finally asked.

"Not anyhow," replied Gandhiji. "Even violence has its code of ethics. For instance, to butcher helpless old men, women and children is not bravery but rank cowardice. Chivalry requires that they should be protected even at the cost of one's life. The history of early Islam is replete with such instances of chivalry and Islam is all the stronger for them."

BRAVERY OR BRUTALITY?

"Would you permit the Hindus to take the offensive?"

"The people of Bihar did and brought disgrace upon themselves and India. They have set the clock of India's independence backward. I have the right to speak about Bihar. In a sense I feel closer to Bihar than to Bengal as fortune enabled me to give a striking demonstration of the non-violence technique in Champaran. I have heard it said that the retaliation in Bihar has 'cooled' the Muslims down. They mean it has cowed them down for the time being. They forget that we can play at a game. Bihar has forged a link in the chain of our slavery. If the Bihar performance is repeated or if the Bihar mentality does not mend, you may note down my words in your diary : *Before long India will pass under the yoke of the Big Three with one of them probably as the mandatory Power. The independence of India is to-day at stake in Bengal and Bihar.*

"The British Government entrusted the Congress with power not because they are in love with the Congress but because they had faith that the Congress would use it wisely and well, not abuse it. To-day Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru finds the ground slipping from under his feet. But he won't let that happen. That is why he is in Bihar. He has said he is going to stay there as long as it may be necessary.

"Biharis have behaved as cowards," he added with deep anguish. Use your arms well, if you must. Do not ill-use them. Bihar has not used its arms well. If the Biharis wanted to retaliate, they could have gone to Noakhali and died to a man. But for a thousand Hindus to fall upon a handful of Mussalmans—men, women and children—living in their midst is no retaliation but just brutality. It is the privilege of arms to protect the weak and helpless. The best succour that Bihar could have given to the Hindus of East Bengal would have been to guarantee with their own lives the absolute safety of the Muslim population living in their midst. Their example would have told. And I have faith that they will still do so with due repentance when the present madness has passed away. Anyway that is the price I have put upon my life, if they want me to live. Here ends the first lesson."

FURTHER LESSONS

The lesson in fearlessness which Gandhiji began at Chandpur, when a deputation of Hindu workers waited upon him, was continued in even more forceful language at Chaumuhani and elsewhere. In fact it has become the central theme of all his talks. "The tragedy is not that so many Muslims have gone mad," he remarked to a friend who saw him at Chaumuhani, "but that so many Hindus in East Bengal have been witnesses to these things. If every Hindu in East Bengal had been done to death, I would not have minded it. Do you know what the Rajputs did? They killed their womenfolk when they issued forth to sacrifice themselves on the battlefield. The surviving ones immolated themselves by mounting the funeral pyre before the fortress fell rather than allow themselves to be captured and dishonoured. There is nothing courageous in thousands of Mussalmans killing out a handful of Hindus in their midst, but that the Hindus should have degraded themselves

by such cowardice, i. e. being witnesses to abduction and rape, forcible conversion and forcible marriage of their womenfolk, is heart-rending."

"How can we create a sense of security and self-confidence?" asked the friend.

"By learning to die bravely. Let us turn our wrath against ourselves. I am not interested in getting the police substituted by the military or the Muslim police. They are broken reed."

"To whom should we appeal—the Congress, the League or the British Government?"

"To none of these. Appeal to yourselves, therefore, to God."

"We are men—made of flesh and blood. We need some material support," finally he asked.

"Then appeal to your own flesh and blood. Purify it of all dross," replied Gandhiji.

He described the anatomy of fear in minute detail in the course of a written message which was read out to the prayer gathering at Kazirkhil on the evening of the 18th November (Monday). In fact it had become the central theme of all his addresses these days. "The more I go about in these parts," he observed, "the more I find that your worst enemy is fear. It eats into the vitals of the terror-stricken as well as the terrorist. The latter fears something in his victim. It may be his different religion or his riches he fears. The second kind of fear is otherwise known as greed. If you search enough, "you will find that greed is a variety of fear. But there has never been and will never be a man who is able to intimidate one who has cast out fear from his heart. Why can no one intimidate the fearless? You will find that God is always by the side of the fearless. Therefore, we should fear Him alone and seek His protection. All other fears will then by itself disappear. Till fearlessness is cultivated by the people there will never be any peace in these parts for the Hindus or for the Mussalmans."

IX

GO THOU FORTH ALONE

All the time that Gandhiji was preaching the message of non-violence of the brave, a resolution was rapidly crystallising in his mind. As always before taking an important decision, he had come to Noakhali without any preconceived plan and had relied on his inner light to point out his way to him. Once he arrived at his decision, he was not to be swayed an inch. He felt he had to demonstrate his faith by submitting it to an acid test with himself in the crucible. He announced his decision to the members of his party in the still hours of the morning of the 15th November : his party was to be dispersed, each member settling down in one affected village and making himself or herself responsible for the safety and security of the Hindu minority of that village. There was considerable personal danger attaching to such workers, but the conquest of fear was the first lesson, as Gandhiji had emphasised, in practical non-violence. "To quell the rage," he said, "is our job."

Five days later, on the 20th November, Gandhiji left Kazirkhil, accompanied by his stenotypist, Shri Parsuram and his Bengali interpreter, Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, and encamped at Shrirampur. The arduous mission, taken at an advanced age and in a far from satisfactory condition of health, is one of the greatest decisions ever taken by any great man. One is strongly reminded of the great resolution of the Buddha as he took his seat under the historic *pipul* tree determined to achieve True Enlightenment :—

*On this seat my body may wither and my skin, bone and flesh dissolve ;
but short of achieving Enlightenment, rarely attained in aeons, I shall not
move from this seat of my desire.*

"The work I am engaged in here," wrote Gandhiji to a friend, "may be my last act. If I return from here alive and unscathed, it will be like a

new birth to me. My *ahimsa* is being tried here through and through as it was never before."

How he announced his decision and embarked on his "do-or-die" mission has been admirably told by Shri Pyarelal in the *Harijan* in two articles which are reproduced below.

1. A VENTURE IN FAITH

Early in the morning on November 15, Gandhiji announced to his party an important decision. He had decided to disperse his party, detailing each member, including the ladies, to settle down in one affected village and make himself or herself hostage of the safety and security of the Hindu minority of that village. They must be pledged to protect with their lives, if necessary, the Hindu population of that village. His decision was not binding on any one of his party, he said. Those who wanted to, were free to go away and take up any of his other constructive activities. "Those who have ill-will against the Mussalmans or Islam in their hearts or cannot curb their indignation at what has happened should stay away. They will only misrepresent me by working under this plan."

So far as he was concerned, he added that his decision was final and irrevocable and left no room for discussion. He was going to bury himself in East Bengal until such time as the Hindus and the Mussalmans learnt to live together in harmony and peace. He would deprive himself of the services of all his companions and fend for himself with whatever assistance he could command locally.

That evening he explained his idea further to the party. A discussion followed in which Shri Thakkar Bapa and Shrimati Sucheta Kripalani also took part. His *ahimsa* would be incomplete, he argued, unless he took that step. Either *ahimsa* is the law of life or it is not. A friend used to say that the *Ahimsa Sutra* in Patanjali, *Ahimsa Pratishthayam Tatsannidhau vairatyagah* was a mistake and needed to be amended and the saying *Ahimsa Paramodharmah* ought to be read as *Himsa paramodharmah*; in other words, violence, not non-violence, was the supreme law. If at the

crucial moment he lost faith in the law of non-violence, he must accept the deceased friend's amendment which appeared to him to be absurd.

"I know the women of Bengal better than probably the Bengalis do. To-day they feel crushed and helpless. The sacrifice of myself and my companions would at least teach them the art of dying with self-respect. It might open too the eyes of the oppressors and melt their hearts. I do not say that the moment my eyes are closed theirs will open. But that will be the ultimate result I have not the slightest doubt. If *ahimsa* disappears, *Hindu Dharma* disappears."

"The issue is not religious but political. It is not a movement against the Hindus, but against the Congress," remarked one member of the party.

"Do you not see that they think that the Congress is a purely Hindu body? And do not forget that I have no water-tight compartments such as religious, political and others. Let us not lose ourselves in a forest of words. How to solve the tangle—violently or non-violently—is the question. In other words, has my method efficacy to-day?"

"How can you reason with people who are thirsting for your blood? Only the other day one of our workers was murdered," said another of the company.

"I know it," replied Gandhiji. "To quell the rage is our job."

Another member asked whether it was right to invite people to return to their villages under the prevailing conditions which involved a considerable amount of risk. Gandhijí's reply was that there was no harm in asking them to return to their villages if the Muslims of that village collectively guaranteed their safety and their guarantee was backed by one good Hindu and one good Mussalman, who would stay with them in that village and protect them by laying down their lives, if necessary. If there was that much guarantee, the refugees ought to return to their homes and face whatever risk there might be. If they had not the courage to live on these terms, Hinduism was doomed to disappear from East Bengal. The question of East Bengal is not one of Bengal alone. The battle for India is to-day being decided in East Bengal. To-day

Mussalmans are being taught by some that Hindu religion is an abomination and therefore forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam a merit. It would save to Islam at least the descendants of those who were forcibly converted. If retaliation is to rule the day, the Hindus, in order to win, will have to outstrip the Mussalmans in the nefarious deeds that the latter are reported to have done. The United Nations set out to fight Hitler with his weapons and ended by out-Hitlering Hitler.

"How can we reassure the people when the miscreants are still at large in these villages?" was the last question asked of Gandhiji.

"That is why," replied Gandhiji, "I have insisted upon one good Mussalman standing security along with a good Hindu for the safety and security of those who might be returning. The former will have to be provided by the Muslim Leaguers who form the Bengal Government."

In a letter to a friend Gandhiji wrote from Dattapara: "The work I am engaged in here may be my last act. If I return from here alive and unscathed, it will be like a new birth to me. My *ahimsa* is being tried here through and through as it was never before."

2. THE "DO OR DIE" MISSION.

On the road of *Satyagraha* there is no stop, no resting place. One must always move on and onward or else retrogress. Gandhiji's decision, which I described as *a venture in faith* in the last issue of the *Harijan*, was taken at Dattapara. On returning from Dattapara, where I had to stop for a day on account of urgent business when Gandhiji shifted to Kazirkhil, I found that he had moved another step forward. He must live in a Muslim household, if a good Muslim Leaguer approved of by the Bengal Ministry would be prepared to receive him as a member of the family. He discussed the question with Goffran Saheb, the Minister for Civil Supplies, who saw him on the 16th and asked him if he could recommend him to any. The latter was taken aback at Gandhiji's living stripped of all his companions in the midst of those who would not know how to look after him. "I shall look after myself. I shall need nobody's service," argued Gandhiji. "Then, I am afraid, I must

say that no Mussalman family is prepared to receive you," replied Goffran Saheb, laughing.

But Gandhiji was not to be put away easily. He expatiated on it in his discourse after the evening prayer. He was in the midst of a Muslim population in Noakhali, he said. He did not like the idea of staying with Hindu friends. He would like to see if he could stay with a League Mussalman. "My requirements are very few. All I want is cleanliness, clean water, permissible food and the freedom to pray to God in my own way." The idea was that if the Hindus saw him living with a Muslim League friend, they would probably get back their confidence and return to their homes more readily. "The Muslim friends will have an opportunity to examine me at close quarters and find out whether I am an enemy or friend."

But he did not want to postpone his new "venture in faith" till a Muslim household was ready to receive him. "When I was in detention in the Aga Khan Palace," he remarked one day, "I once sat down to write a thesis on India as a protagonist of Non-violence. But as I proceeded with my writing I could not go on. I had to stop. There are two aspects of Hinduism. There is, on the one hand, the historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of stocks and stones, animal sacrifice and so on. On the other, we have the Hinduism of the *Gita*, the *Upanishads* and *Patanjali's Yoga Sutra* which is the acme of *ahimsa* and oneness of all creation, pure worship of one immanent, formless, imperishable God. *Ahimsa*, which to me is the chief glory of Hinduism, has been sought to be explained away by our people as being meant for *sannyasis* only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is the way of life and India has to show it to the world. Where do I stand? Do I represent this *ahimsa* in my person? If I do, then deceit and hatred that poison the atmosphere should dissolve. It is only by going into isolation from my companions, those on whose help I have relied all along, and standing on my own crutches that I shall find my bearings and also test my faith in God."

To Sevagram Ashram people he wrote :

"I am afraid you must give up all hope of my early returning or

returning at all to the Ashram. The same applies to my companions. It is a herculean task that faces me. I am being tested. Is the *Satyagraha* of my conception a weapon of the weak or really that of the strong? I must either realize the latter or lay down my life in the attempt to attain it. That is my quest. In pursuit of it I have come to bury myself in this devastated village. His will be done."

On the 20th. Gandhiji broke up his camp at Kazirkhil, Columbus-like, to face the dark unknown, accompanied only by his stenotypist, Shri Parsuram and Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, his Bengali interpreter. Before embarking the little group round him held a short prayer when his favourite hymn "*Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye*" was sung. Many voices were husky, many eyes dim with tears as the tiny country boat bearing him disappeared beyond the bridge, in the direction of Shrirampur.

Following upon his departure the members of his party dispersed themselves one by one in various appointed places. A map showing the area covered and the various centres where Gandhiji and the members of his party are stationed will be found elsewhere.*

The hut where he was put up in Shrirampur is in an open sunny clearing in the midst of thick groves of stately arecanut and cocoanut palms. Round about it is spread out a grim scene of arson and devastation. He has given up his warm immersion bath and for the first two days did his own massage. Since his arrival he has had several meetings with Shamsuddin Sahib and others and a conference with about 30 representatives of the Hindus and Muslims of Ramganj at Ramganj. As a result they were able to evolve a plan for the re-establishment of peace and communal harmony. The Ministers gave a solemn word of honour that they meant to implement it. The plan was put before the public at a public meeting that was held in the village of Chandipur on the 23rd November.

*The map used in this volume is not the one accompanying Shri Pyarelal's article, but a specially prepared map using the directions given in the *Harijan* map.—Editor.

Gandhiji, speaking at the close of the meeting, uttered the following significant words :

"Here are elected Muslims who are running the Government of the Province. They have given you their word of honour. They would not be silent witnesses to the repetition of shameful deeds. My advice to the Hindus is to believe their word and give them a trial. This does not mean that there would not be a single bad Mussalman left in East Bengal. There are good and bad men amongst all communities. Dishonourable conduct could break any Ministry or organization in the end..... If you want real peace there is no other way except to have mutual trust and confidence. Bihar, they say, has avenged Noakhali. Supposing the Muslims of East Bengal or the Muslims all over India make up their minds to avenge Bihar, where would India be ?.....After all, if the worst came to the worst, you can only lose your lives. Only, you must do so as brave men and women.....If Shamsuddin Saheb and his companions do not mean what they have said, you will know. I for one would not wish to be a living witness to such a tragedy."

GANDHIJI'S PRESS STATEMENT

On the eve (November 20) of his departure for Shrirampur Gandhiji issued the following statement to the Press :

"I find myself in the midst of exaggeration and falsity. I am unable to discover the truth. There is terrible mutual distrust. Oldest friendships have snapped. Truth and *ahimsa*, by which I swear, and which have to my knowledge sustained me for sixty years, seem to fail to show the attributes I have ascribed to them.

"To test them, or better, to test myself, I am going to a village called Shrirampur, cutting myself away from those who have been with me all these years, and who have made life easy for me. I am taking Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose as my Bengali teacher and interpreter and Shri Parsuram, who has been my most devoted, selfless and silent stenographer.

"The other workers whom I have brought with me will each distribute themselves in other villages of Noakhali to do the work of peace, if it is at all possible, between the two communities. They are, unfortu-

nately, all non-Bengalis except little Abha. They will, therefore, be accompanied by one Bengali worker each as teacher and interpreter, even like Prof. N. K. Bose will be to me.

"Distribution work and selection work will be done by Sri Satish Chandra Das Gupta of the Khadi Pratisthan. My ideal is to live in a local Muslim League family, but I see that I must not wait for that happy day. I must meanwhile establish such contacts with the Muslims as I can in their own villages. My suggestion to the League Ministers is that they should give me one honest and brave Muslim to accompany one equally honest and brave Hindu for each affected village. They should guarantee at the cost of their lives, if need be, the safety of the returning Hindu refugees. I am sorry to have to confess that without some such thing it seems to me difficult to induce them to return to their villages.

"From all accounts received by me, life is not as yet smooth and safe for the minority community in the villages. They, therefore, prefer to live as exiles from their own homes, crops, plantations and surroundings, and live on inadequate and ill-balanced doles.

"Many friends from outside Bengal have written to me to allow them to come for peace work, but I have strongly dissuaded them from coming. I would love to let them come if and when I see light through this impenetrable darkness.

"In the meantime, both Pyarelal and I have decided to suspend all other activities in the shape of correspondence, including the heavy work of the *Harijan* and the allied weeklies. I have asked Shri Kishorlal, Shri Kakasabhai, Shri Vinoba and Shri Narhari Parikh to edit the weeklies jointly and severally. Pyarelal and I may, if our work permits, send stray contributions from our respective villages. Correspondence will be attended to from Sevagram.

"How long this suspense will last, is more than I can say. This much however, I can. I do not propose to leave East Bengal till I am satisfied that mutual trust has been established between the two communi-

ties and the two have resumed the even tenor of their life in their villages. Without this there is neither Pakistan nor Hindustan—only slavery awaits India, torn asunder by mutual strife and engrossed in barbarity.

"No one need at present be disturbed about my low diet. On receipt of the following wire from Dr. Rajendra Prasad : *'Letter received. Have already wired quiet. There have been no incidents for a week now. Situation satisfactory. Most earnestly desire resumption of normal diet. Myself going Delhi 19th'* I resumed goat's milk from yesterday and propose to revert to normal diet as early as the system permits. The future is in God's keeping."

UNDER GOD'S PROTECTION

Gandhiji on the eve of his departure for Shrirampur, explained in an interview to a Press correspondent the significance underlying the new experiment which he was launching.

Q. Will the new experiment which you propose to inaugurate to-morrow of going and living singly in the affected villages, come to infuse courage into the hearts of the refugees and succeed in persuading them to return to their villages? What is the significance underlying this experiment?

A. It would not arise if you knew that I was going to a village for my own sake, i. e. to test my *Ahimsa*. Then I am not going singly. There will be Shri Nirmal Kumar Bose, as my Bengali interpreter, and my stenographer Parasuram. If I have the requisite courage, inner *ahimsa*, I should expect to affect both the Hindus and the Muslims in the right manner. You should also know that all the members of my original party will similarly distribute themselves, taking with them a local Bengali worker. The choice of the village will rest with Shri Satish Chandra Das Gupta.

Asked whether the Bengal Government would not feel that his action

was aimed at bringing ridicule on them. Gandhiji replied : "I think not, if only because I have not the remotest idea of bringing ridicule on them, assuming of course, that the Bengal Government meant every word of what they have said. Indeed, I am in search of a League Muslim who will harbour me in his house as a member of his family."

Q. Are you not taking serious liberty with your life at this stage by proposing to live in a village which is perhaps not free from *goondas* ?

A. I recognise no one as *goondas*—or all are *goondas*, some more, some less. I have got a conviction that so long as God wants my service in the present body, He will keep it from all harm.

